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IN THIS ISSUE

THE RETURN OF CAPTAIN FUTURE

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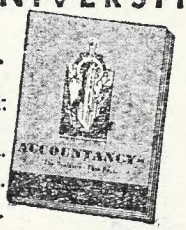

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Vol. 20, No. 3 A THRILLING PUBLICATION January, 1950

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Short Stories

STARS OVER SANTA CLAUS.....William Morrison 71
It's more blessed to give than receive, even when you use a materializer

THE LAST ADMIRAL.....Rene LaFayette 112
Politicians of the future learn you can't teach an old space dog new tricks

HATHOR'S PETS.....Margaret St. Clair 126
She had unanswerable weapons to use when they began acting like people!

REGROWTH.....J. W. Groves 133
Doctor Sutgen performs a weird experiment in cellular development

THE FIRST ONE.....John D. MacDonald 139
It was up to Bus Bannister to climb into the rocket ship, or else!

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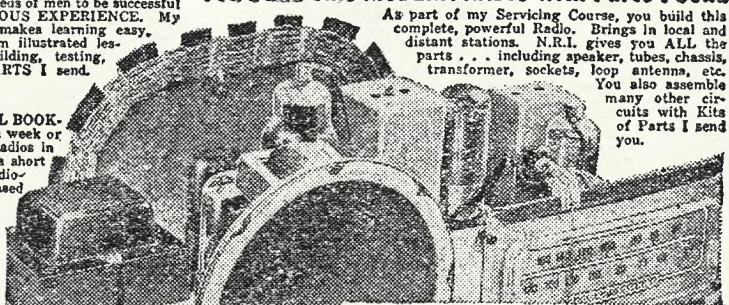

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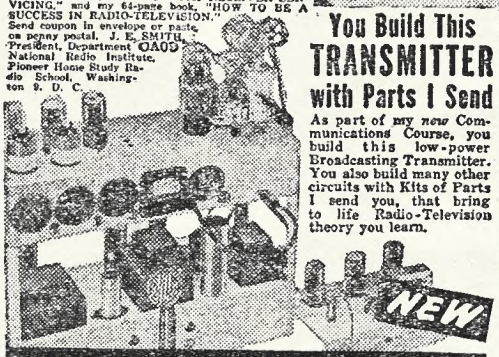

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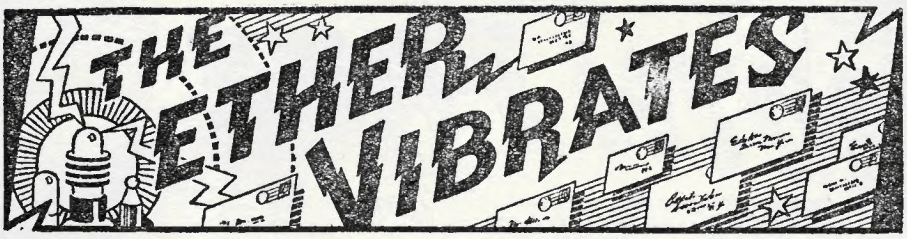

"LISTEN—let's take this Joe and send him into the far future. He's just an ordinary fellow—maybe he was intercollegiate jujutsu champ and gained an extra leg instead of losing one in World War Two. You know the kind of a guy I mean. You could run into him on any street corner.

"Well, we put him in the far future and there's a war going on. On one side we have the scientists—they've been running the world like a laboratory. On the other we have the little people, the misfits the scientists consider beneath their notice.

"Now our hero is just an ordinary guy, see, but he has this third leg—we can work up some terrific jujutsu stunts with it—and he is able to help these misfit people conquer the scientists. And there's a girl—one of the scientists but she really is in sympathy with the misfits, only the hero doesn't know it and . . ."

It's a safe bet that this conversation, with certain variations, has been indulged in, mentally or aloud, several million times since science fiction came into being. Sometimes our fellow is a girl. Sometimes he or she is sent into the far past, sometimes to Venus, to Mars or to the planets of a distant star. It isn't the variations that matter especially—it's the similarity.

Always War!

For always or almost always, when our hero reaches his destination, whether by accident or design, he finds a war going on or just about to start. And always, putting his little twentieth-century brain against the super weapons of the enemy, he manages by sheer ingenuity, by implausible physical valor or by mere ubiquity, to play the decisive role in the conflict.

What we want to know is why he always walks right into a war. Perhaps even more than the dictatorship theme we have reviled for so long, war is the common denominator of the science fiction story on strange worlds.

All right, you say, we are living in an age of war. It is only natural that war should occupy the reverie when a story is being dreamed up for stf consumption. We are surrounded by war or the threat of war and have been so since 1914.

True enough—as far as it goes. But it doesn't go far enough. For this preoccupation with war goes back at least to Jonathan Swift's Gulliver, who found himself the decisive agent in the Lilliput-Blufuscu imbroglio. Remember, he tied strings to all the Blufuscan battleships and towed them away from Lilliput?

We have a hunch that the stf author's delight in armed conflict stems from a pair of more fundamental causes. They are simple and universal if not exactly sweet.

The Basis of Tension

In the first place, conflict is the basis of all story tension, which in turn is the basis of most reader interest. There must be a struggle of some sort whose issue remains in doubt until the finale. And of all conflicts open physical warfare is the most obviously deadly.

To deal with war at all realistically in the world we know is a job whose complexity has taxed authors of the stature of Tolstoi and Sienkiewicz, to say nothing of G. A. Henty. The reason is simple—all of us know too much about it in the here and now.

But given a nice fresh world to deal with the author can dish up the elements of his conflict to suit his own whim or the exigencies of his plot. He can eliminate this or that difficult element—say labor, capital, urban population trends, housing, deficit spending—and present the simplest of

(Continued on page 8)

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

outline drawings with conviction. In short, it is both exciting and easy.

A Child's Dream

The second cause, we believe, stems back to the universal child's dream. In this the tot who feels the pressure of an incomprehensible adult world likes to imagine himself, with his tin sword, water pistol or spark-shooting machine-gun, performing deeds of incredible heroism and becoming a veritable benevolent Alexander—against dragons, giants, Nazis, Communists or whatever he has been told is inimical to his interests.

Too many authors—to say nothing of readers—lapse automatically into this long-buried dream when confronted with a world of the imagination. They or their heroes (the distinction is usually marked by an invisible line) mount their shaggy Shetland jeeps and ride gloriously into combat and victory.

Defeat? This is merely a passing phase to increase and prolong the suspense. For who ever lost a dream?

We have run and shall doubtless continue to run stories based on this theme—since our control over our authors is necessarily limited. In fact, we have found ourselves repeatedly trapped in such stories as raptly as any of our readers.

For this is an attractive and inspiring idea—man, alone and relatively unarmed, facing, mastering and shaping to his own ends the infinite perils of the alien unknown. It has been one of the great wellsprings of the entire growth of science fiction.

Looking Ahead

If we did not sincerely feel that science fiction is on the eve of an upthrust toward a far more important niche in the world of letters and popular interest than it has hitherto held, we should in no way be perturbed. It is sound escapist stuff to the core.

But somehow we have a hunch that when science fiction does make its big move for general recognition it will be because of a breaking away from such formula antics rather than through any sudden emergence of this reverie-plot into high critical acclaim.

With this in mind, we hope our authors can come up more frequently with stories in which the conflicts represented so flatly by make-believe warfare and militant conspiracy will be replaced, without loss of suspense, by some of the countless more interesting three-dimensional facets of human reaction not only to human but to alien life. Upon this development it is our hunch that the future greatness of science fiction depends!

OUR NEXT ISSUE

WELL, we get away from our hobby-horse hero in March, when Norman A. Daniels moves in with a thoroughly "different" featured novel, THE LADY IS A WITCH. For in this instance the chief protagonist, Dr. William Wilson of Boston and Brookline, Massachusetts, is a poor bedeviled soul whose chief concern is mastery of himself rather than of any alien worlds.

Dr. Wilson, last of a long line of eminent Boston physicians, stemming from the seventeenth century in direct line, is an out-and-out flop, a fish in the ozone, worse—a doctor without patients. A potentially gifted diagnostician and research technician, the pressure of his forbears has forced him into surgery—for which he has neither nerve nor interest.

Clients, classmates and colleagues have given him up—save for his fiancee, Natalie Page, who stubbornly refuses to view him as a failure. And even she is getting fed up with his increasing lack of self-confidence.

Then into his life comes Dr. Thaddeus Link, a parapsychologist on sabbatical leave from his chair at M.I.T. Dr. Link is conducting some strange experiments in measurement of certain human radiations which vanish mysteriously at death. He is of the belief that these radiations may be the life-force itself and that, if properly contained, their existence after death may be proved.

Digging into the past of Wilson's incredibly upright family, he has made the—to Wilson at any rate—shocking discovery that not only was one of the early members of the distinguished clan buried alive as a wizard during the witchcraft panic of 1672 but that the remains, encased in a hermetically-sealed lead-lined coffin, still repose in the Wilson burial vault in the rear of his down-

(Continued on page 142)

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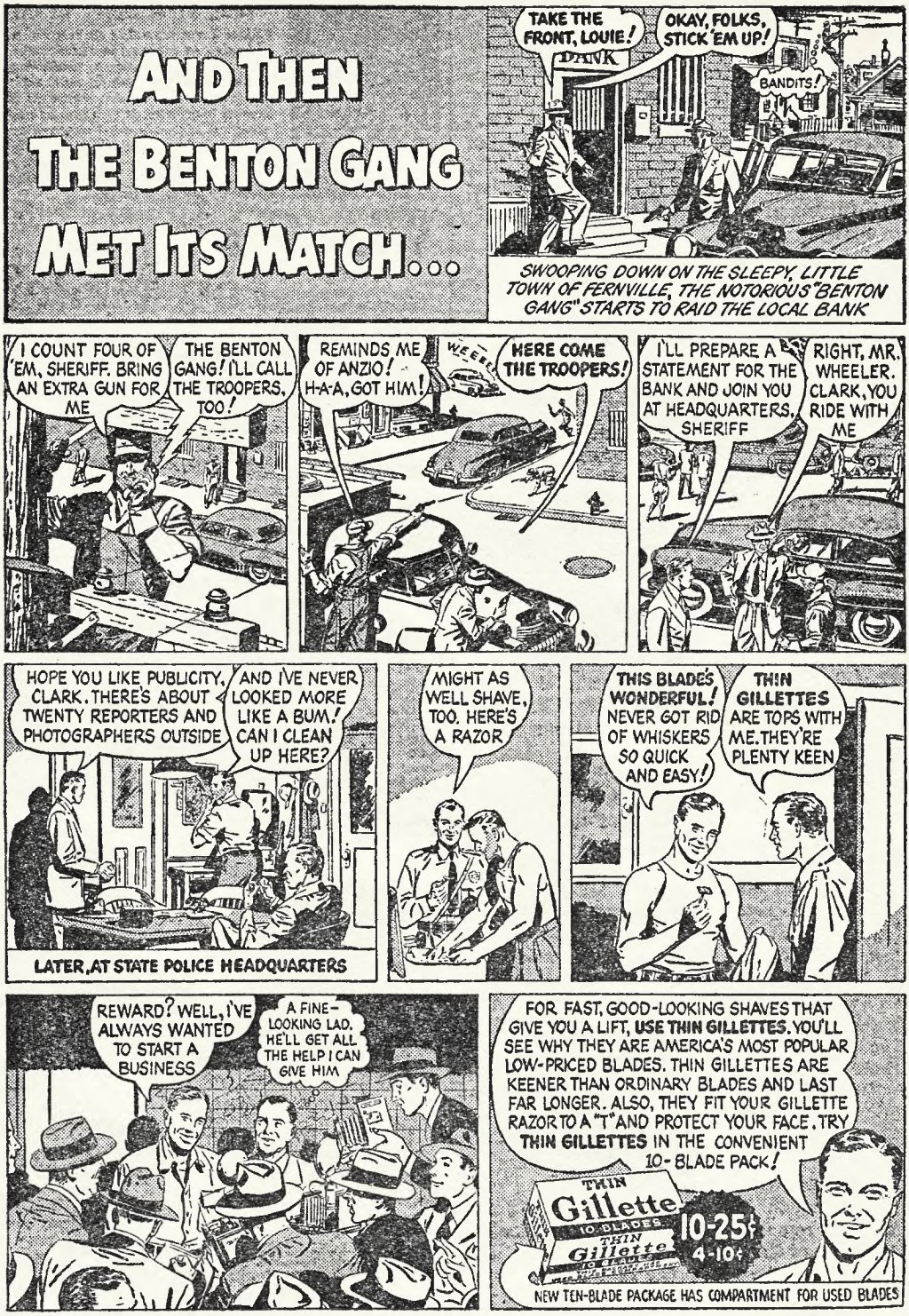
AND THEN THE BENTON GANG MET ITS MATCH...
TAKE THE FRONT, LOUIE!
OKAY, FOLKS, STICK 'EM UP!
BANK
BANDITS!
SWOOPING DOWN ON THE SLEEPY, LITTLE TOWN OF FERNVILLE, THE NOTORIOUS "BENTON GANG" STARTS TO RAID THE LOCAL BANK
I COUNT FOUR OF 'EM, SHERIFF. BRING AN EXTRA GUN FOR ME
THE BENTON GANG! I'LL CALL THE TROOPERS, TOO!
REMINDS ME OF ANZIO! H-A-A, GOT HIM!
WEEEE
HERE COME THE TROOPERS!
I'LL PREPARE A STATEMENT FOR THE BANK AND JOIN YOU AT HEADQUARTERS, SHERIFF
RIGHT, MR. WHEELER. CLARK, YOU RIDE WITH ME
HOPE YOU LIKE PUBLICITY, CLARK. THERE'S ABOUT TWENTY REPORTERS AND PHOTOGRAPHERS OUTSIDE
AND I'VE NEVER LOOKED MORE LIKE A BUM! CAN I CLEAN UP HERE?
LATER, AT STATE POLICE HEADQUARTERS
MIGHT AS WELL SHAVE, TOO. HERE'S A RAZOR
THIS BLADE'S WONDERFUL! NEVER GOT RID OF WHISKERS SO QUICK AND EASY!
THIN GILLETTES ARE TOPS WITH ME. THEY'RE PLENTY KEEN
REWARD? WELL, I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO START A BUSINESS
A FINE-LOOKING LAD. HE'LL GET ALL THE HELP I CAN GIVE HIM
FOR FAST, GOOD-LOOKING SHAVES THAT GIVE YOU A LIFT, USE THIN GILLETTES. YOU'LL SEE WHY THEY ARE AMERICA'S MOST POPULAR LOW-PRICED BLADES. THIN GILLETTES ARE KEENER THAN ORDINARY BLADES AND LAST FAR LONGER. ALSO, THEY FIT YOUR GILLETTE RAZOR TO A "T" AND PROTECT YOUR FACE. TRY THIN GILLETTES IN THE CONVENIENT 10-BLADE PACK!
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THE SHADOW MEN

When he allowed Marie Chanette to die, Cargill tore open the entire fabric of time to come!

"This time let's not waste a moment," said Ann (Chap. IX)

A Novel by

A. E. VAN VOGT

CHAPTER I

Therapy—To Be Murdered

LIEUTENANT MORTON CARGILL staggered as he came out of the cocktail bar. He stopped and was turning, instinctively seeking support, when a girl emerged from the same bar. She half fell against him.

They clung to each other, maintaining a precarious balance. She seemed to recover first. She mumbled, " 'Member, you promised to drive me home."

"Huh?" said Cargill. He was about to add, "Why, I've never seen you before."

He didn't say it because it suddenly struck him that he had never before in

his life been so drunk either. And there was a vagueness about the last hour that lent a sort of a plausibility to her words.

He certainly had intended to find himself a girl before the evening was over.

Besides, what did it matter anyway? This was 1943. He was a man who had three days left of his embarkation leave and he couldn't stop to argue about the extent of his acquaintance.

"Where's your car?"

She led the way, weaving, to a Chevrolet coupé. He had to help her unlock the door and she collapsed onto the seat beside the steering wheel, her head hanging limply. Cargill climbed behind the wheel and almost slid to the floor.

For a moment that pulled him out of his own blur.

He thought, startled, "I'm not fit to drive a car either. I'd better get a taxi."

The impulse faded. He was a man who had three days left of his leave. As of right now the pickup was a fact, whatever its history, and he was just tight enough not to have any qualms. He stepped on the starter.

* * * * *

Cargill made the first effort to get out of the car after the crash. The door wouldn't open. His attempt at movement made him aware of how squeezed in he was. Dazed, he realized that he had escaped death and injury by a miracle.

He tried to reach across the girl toward the door on her side—and got his second big shock.

The whole front of the car was staved in.

Even in the half darkness Cargill realized that the blow had been mortal. In a spasm of comprehension of what this could mean he made a new effort to open his own door. This time it worked. He staggered out and off into the darkness. No one tried to stop him, no one saw him.

In the morning, pale and sober, he read the newspaper report of the accident:

GIRL'S BODY FOUND IN WRECK

Her car smashed beyond repair when it sideswiped a tree, Mrs. Marie Chanette last night bled to death from injuries sustained in the accident. The body was not discovered until early this morning and it is believed the victim might have been saved had she been found sooner and treated.

Mrs. Chanette, who was separated from her husband recently, is survived by a three year old baby girl and a brother, said to be living in New York. Funeral arrangements await word from relatives.

There was no mention of a possible escort. A later edition mentioned that she had been seen talking to a soldier, and that paragraph was enlarged upon in the evening paper. By the second morning there was talk of murder in the news columns, and an amazingly accurate description of the soldier was given. The wretched Cargill took alarm, and returned gloomily to his camp.

He was relieved a week later when his division was sent overseas. It put three years between him and the impulse that had made him scamper off into the darkness, leaving behind him a dying woman. Battle experience hardened him against the reality of death for other people and slowly the awful sense of guilt faded. Completely recovered, he returned to Los Angeles early in 1946. He had been home several months when a note arrived for him in the morning mail:

Dear Captain Cargill:

I saw you on the street the other day and I noticed your name was still listed in the phone book. I wonder if you would be so kind as to meet me at the Hotel Gifford tonight (Wednesday) at about 8:30.

Yours in curiosity,

Marie Chanette.

Cargill read the note, puzzled, and for just a moment the name meant nothing to him. Then he remembered. And then—

"B—but," he thought, stunned, "she never knew my name."

Centuries Haunted by an Inescapable Destiny!

It required minutes to shake off the chilling sensation that stole along his spine. At first he decided against turning up but as evening arrived he knew he couldn't remain away.

"Yours in curiosity!" What did she mean?

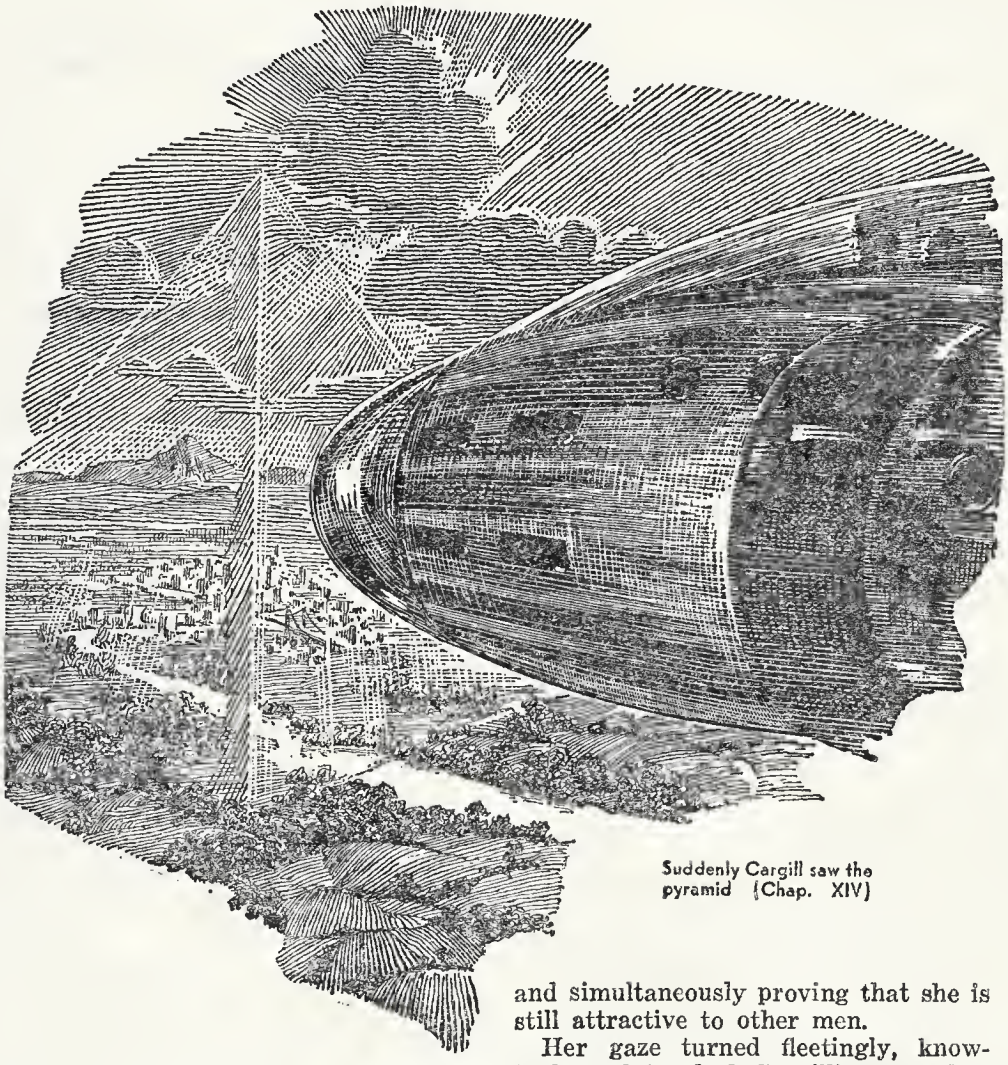
It was 8:15 when he entered the foyer of the magnificent Gifford and took up a position beside a pillar from which he could watch the main entrance.

He waited.

AT 9:30, he retreated, blushing from his fifth attempt to identify Marie Chanette.

He hadn't noticed the man behind the column who was talking to the girl. The girl was smiling sweetly now, the secret smile of a female who has won the double victory of defending her virtue and simultaneously proving that she is still attractive to other men.

Her gaze turned fleetingly, knowingly and touched Cargill's eyes, then her attention swung back in a proprietary fashion to the young man. She smiled once more, too sweetly. Then she took her escort's arm and they moved



Suddenly Cargill saw the pyramid (Chap. XIV)

off through a door above which floated a lighted sign that said alluringly, DREAM ROOM.

The high color faded from Cargill's cheeks as he took up his position once more. But his determination was beginning to wane. Five women had now repulsed him and that was too strenuous for any one evening.

A big man moved up beside him. He said softly, "Captain, how about peddling your wares in some other hotel? Your repeated failure is beginning to embarrass the guests. In other words, move on, bud, move on. And fast."

House dick—Cargill stared at the other's smooth face with a pale intensity. He was about to slink off when a young woman's voice said clearly, "Have I kept you waiting long, Captain?"

Cargill swung around in glassy-eyed relief. Then he stopped. His brain roared. He mumbled, "You're Marie Chanette."

She was changed but there was no doubt. It was she. Out of the corner of one eye he saw the house detective move off, baffled. An impulse came to call the man back.

Even as the thought came he forgot the fellow. For his fascinated brain, there was only the girl.

"It really *is* you," he said. "Marie Chanette!"

Her name came hard from his tongue as if the words were pebbles that interfered with his speech. He began to realize how changed she was, how different.

The girl he had picked up three years before had been well dressed but not like this. Now she wore a "hot pink" sari with a fur coat of indeterminable animal lightly held over her shoulders, the most glittering coat Cargill had seen since his return to America.

Her clothes ceased to matter. "But you're dead," he wanted to say. "I read the account of your burial."

He didn't say that. Instead he listened as the girl murmured, "Let's go into the bar. We can talk about—old times—over a drink."

Cargill poured down the first drink without pausing. Then he looked blurrily at the girl. And saw that she was watching him with a faint indulgent smile.

"I wondered," she said, "what it would be like to come back and have a drink with a murderer. It's really not very funny, is it?"

Cargill began to gather his defenses. There was something here he didn't understand, a purpose deeper than appeared on the surface. He had seen suppressed hostility too often not to recognize it instantly. This woman was out to hurt him and he had better watch himself.

"I don't know what you mean," he said sharply and his voice had a faint snarl in it. "I'm not sure that I even know you."

The woman did not answer immediately. She was doing something to her purse. It opened abruptly. She reached in and took out two large photographs. She tossed them across the table without a word.

IT gave Cargill several seconds to focus his unsteady gaze on the prints. His eyes and his mind coördinated finally, and with a gasp he snatched them up.

Each one showed a man in an officer's uniform in the act of climbing out of a badly wrecked car. The realism of the scenes almost stopped Cargill's breath.

One of the prints showed the girl pinned by the door on her side. Her face was twisted and blood was streaming down over her eyes.

The second print was a full face of the officer, taken on an upward slant from an almost impossible position behind the girl.

Both prints showed the officer's face and both showed him squeezing out of the partly open door on the driver's side.

In each case it was his own countenance.

Cargill let the prints drop from limp fingers and stared at the girl with eyes that narrowed with calculation. "What

do you want?" he asked harshly. Then more violently, "Where did you get those pictures?"

The last question galvanized him into action. He snatched the prints as if defending them from her, as if they were the only evidence against him. With tensed fingers he began to rip them into tiny pieces.

"You may keep those copies," said the girl calmly.

Copies! Cargill shifted his feet and he must have looked up. For a waiter darted forward and he heard himself ordering drinks. And then the whisky was back and he was pouring it down into his burning throat. He thought more sanely that, if she were alive, no charge could be brought against him after all this time.

He saw that she was fumbling in her purse. She drew forth a glittering cigarette and, putting it in her mouth, took a deep puff, then exhaled a thin cloud of smoke. Without seeming to notice his gaze fastened on the "cigarette" she delved once again into her purse, this time came out with a card the size of a streetcar pass, tossed it across the table at him.

"You will be wondering," she said, "what this is all about. There, that explains to some extent. Suppose you look at it."

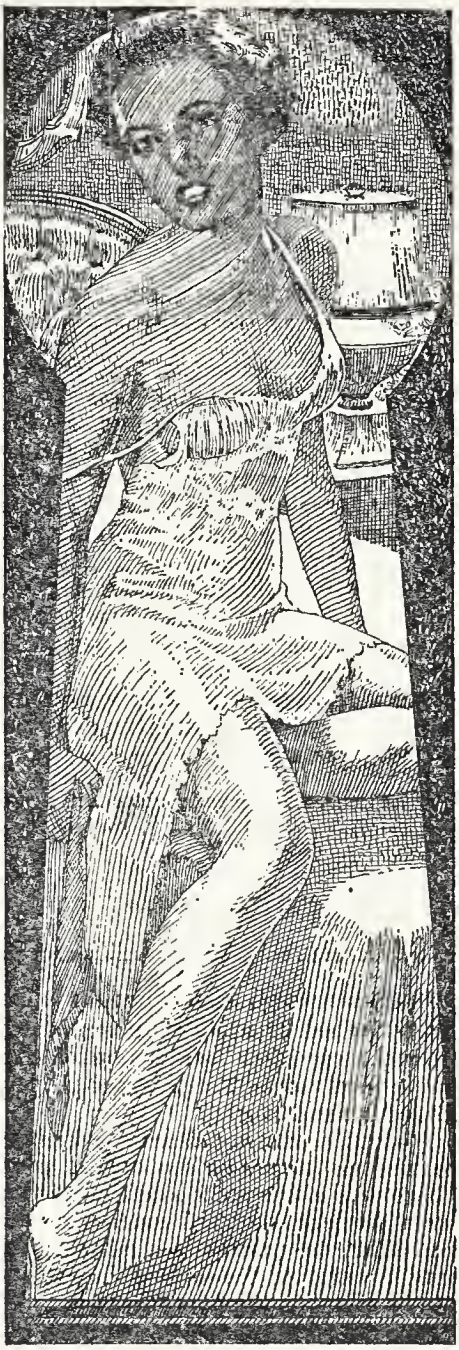
CARGILL scarcely heard.

"That cigarette," he said. "You didn't light it."

"Cigarette?" She looked puzzled, then she glanced in the direction of his glare. Understanding dawned. She reached once more into her purse, and came out with a second cigarette similar to the one she was smoking. She held it out to him.

"It works automatically," she said, "every time you draw on it. Very simple but I'd forgotten they won't be available for a hundred years yet. Very soothing they are."

He needed it. The cigarette seemed to be made from some kind of plastic but the flavor was pure mild tobacco. Cargill drew on it deeply three times.



"Don't dare try the door," cried Ann (Chap. XIII)

Then, his nerves steadier, he forgot the uniqueness of such a cigarette and picked up the document she had thrown

on the table. A luminous print stared up at him:

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FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL ADJUSTMENTS
recommend
READJUSTMENT THERAPEUTICS
for
Captain Morton Cargill
June 5, 1946
CRIME: MURDER
THERAPY: TO BE MURDERED

The sinking sensation that came to Cargill had in it a consciousness of darkness gathering over his mind. He was aware of a boogie woogie record starting to play nearby. He shook himself blurrily. Through a thick mist he gazed at the girl. "This is silly," he muttered. "You're kidding me."

She shook her head. "It isn't me. Once I went to *them* it was out of my control. And as for you the moment you picked up that card you were—"

Her voice retreated into a remote distance as the shadows swept in over him.

There was night.

CHAPTER II

Escape in Time

THE blackness ended but his vision remained blurred. The obstruction cleared away after he had blinked hard for several seconds. Automatically he looked around him.

At first, he did not clearly realize that he was no longer in the DREAM ROOM. There was a tremendous difference but for a moment his mind made a desperate effort to justify a similarity. He tried to think of the cocktail bar as having been stripped of its furniture.

The illusion collapsed. He saw that he was sitting in a chair at one end of a tastefully furnished living-room. To his left was an open door through which he could see the edge of a bed. The wall directly across from him was a mirror.

Once more he had to make an adjustment. For as he looked into the "mirror" he saw that there was a girl sitting in what would have been the mirror image of his own chair. It was the girl who resembled Marie Chanette.

Cargill started to his feet. In two minutes, in a frenzy of uneasy amazement, he explored the apartment. The door he had seen when his vision first cleared led to a bedroom with attached bathroom. The bathroom had a connecting door but it was locked. The living room wall was not a mirror at all but a window.

Beyond it was a virtual duplicate of the apartment he was in. There were the same living room and the same door leading to another room—Cargill could not see if it was a bedroom but he presumed that it was. On one wall of the living room was a clock which said: "May 6, 6:22 P.M." It had obviously stopped working a month ago.

He had been moving with a feverish excitement. Now he retreated warily to a chair and sat there, glaring at the girl. He remembered what she had said in the cocktail bar—remembered the card and its deadly threat.

He was still thinking about it when the girl climbed to her feet and came over to the glass barrier. She said something or rather her mouth moved as if in speech. Not so much as a whisper of sound came through. Cargill was galvanized. He plunged up from his chair, and yelled, "Where are we?"

The girl shook her head. Baffled, Cargill explored the wall for a possible means of communication. Then he looked around the room for a telephone. There was none. Not, he reflected presently, in a brief fury of self-anger, that a phone would have done him any good.

There was such a thing as having a phone number to call. Another thought struck him. Frantically he searched for pencil and paper in the inside breast pocket of his coat. Sighing with relief, he produced the materials. His fingers trembled as he wrote: *Where are we?*

He held the paper against the glass. The girl nodded her understanding and

went back to get her purse. Cargill could see her writing in a small notebook, then she was back at the glass barrier. She held up the paper. Cargill read, *I think this is Shadow City.*

That was meaningless. *Where's that?* Cargill wrote.

The girl shrugged and answered, *Somewhere in the future from both your time and mine.*

That calmed him. He had his first conviction that he was dealing with queer people. His eyes narrowed with calculation. Cautiously he considered the danger to himself of a cult that put forward such nonsense. The girl was forgotten, and he went back slowly and settled down in the chair.

"They won't dare harm me," he told himself.

Just how it had been worked he couldn't decide. But apparently the family of Marie Chanette had somehow discovered the identity of the man who had been with the girl when she was killed and in the distorted fashion of kinfolk, blamed him completely for the accident.

He had no sense of guilt, Cargill told himself. And he certainly had no intention of accepting any nonsense from a bunch of neurotic relatives.

Anger welled up in him, directed now and no longer stimulated by fear and confusion. A dozen plans for counteraction sprang full-grown into his mind. He'd break the glass, smash the door that led from the bathroom, break every stick of furniture in the room.

These people were going to regret even this tiny action they had taken against him. For the third time, with deliberation now, he climbed to his feet. And he was hefting a chair for his first attack when a man's voice spoke at him from the air directly in front of him.

"Morton Cargill, it is my duty to explain to you why you must be killed."

Cargill remained where he was, rigid.

HE unfroze swiftly. As his mind started to work again he looked wildly around him, seeking the hidden speaker from which the voice had come. He assumed that it had been mechanical. He rejected the momentary illusion that the voice had come from mid-air.

His gaze raked the ceiling, the floor, the walls, in vain. He was about to explore more thoroughly with his fingers, with his eyes close up, when the voice spoke again, this time almost in his ear.

"It is necessary," it said, "to talk to you in advance, because of the effect on your nervous system."

The meaning scarcely penetrated. He was fighting a sense of panic. The voice *had* come from a point only inches away from his ear and yet there was nothing. No matter which way he turned the room was empty. And there was no sign of any mechanical device. Definitely there was nothing that could have produced the illusion of somebody speaking directly into his ear.

For a third time, the voice spoke, this time from behind him. "You see, Captain Cargill, the important thing in such a therapy as this is that there be a readjustment on the electro-colloidal level of the body.

"Such changes cannot be artificially induced. Hypnosis is not adequate because no matter how deep the trance, there is a part of the mind which is aware of the illusion.

"You will readily see what I mean when I say that even in cases of the most profound amnesia you can presently tell the subject that he will remember everything that has happened. The fact that that memory is here, capable of recall under proper stimulus, explains the prolonged therapies sometimes necessary even with hypnosis."

This time there was no doubt. The speech was long, and Cargill had time to turn around, time to assure himself that the voice was coming from a point in the air about a foot or so above his head. The discovery shocked some basic point of stability in him.

He had let go of the chair with which he had intended to smash the furniture. Now he snatched it up again. He stood with it clenched in his hands, eyes

narrowed, body as stiff as the wood of the chair itself, and listened as once more that disembodied voice spoke.

"Only a fact," it said inexorably, "can affect quick and violent changes. It is not enough to imagine that a machine is bearing down upon you at top speed, even if the imagining is accomplished in a state of deep hypnosis.

"Only when the machine actually rushes at you and the danger is there in concrete fashion before your eyes—only then does doubt end. Only then does every part of the mind and body accept the reality."

Cargill was beginning to lose some of his own doubts. He had his first sharp feeling that this was real. Here were not just a few angry relatives. He let go of the chair and began to relax.

Here was danger, definite, personal, immediate. And that was something that he could face. For more than three years he had been conditioned to a series of reactions when he was threatened—a remorseless alertness and an almost paradoxical combination of keyed-up relaxation.

He said now, "What is all this? Where am I?"

That was becoming tremendously important. He needed information now to stabilize himself. This situation was new and different from anything that he had ever experienced before. And what was particularly vital was that he had taken the first step necessary to combatting it. He accepted its reality.

Someone was doing something against him. Whoever it was had enough money to set up these two rooms in this curious fashion. It looked very expensive. It *was* convincing. From the air the voice, ignoring his questions, went on.

"It would not be enough to tell the descendants of Marie Chanette that you had been killed. The girl has to see the death scene. She has to look down at you after you have been killed. She has to be able to touch your cold flesh and realize the finality of what has happened. Only thus can we assure adjustment on the electro-colloidal level."

The voice finished quietly. "But now, I would suggest that you rest awhile. My words need time to sink in. You will hear from me again in the evening—for the last time."

Cargill did not accept the finality of the words. For several minutes he asked questions, talking directly at the point from which the voice had come. There was no reply. In the end, grim and determined, he gave up that approach, and returned to an earlier more violent one.

For ten minutes he smashed a chair against the glass barrier. It *was* a case of smashing. The wooden chair creaked and vibrated from each blow and shattered section by section. The glass was not even scratched.

Reluctantly, Cargill accepted its impregnability. He headed for the bathroom, and tested the door that led from it. He gave one tug at the knob and his heart sank. The door was made of a hard metal. For an hour he worked on it without once affecting it in any visible fashion.

He headed for the bedroom finally and lay down, intending to rest briefly. He must have fallen asleep instantly.

SOMEBODY was shaking him violently. Cargill came out of the stupor of sleep to the sound of a woman's voice saying urgently in his ear, "Hurry! There's no time to waste. We must leave at once."

He was a man who expected to be murdered and that was his first memory. He jerked so spasmodically it seemed as if his body would tear.

And then he was sitting up.

He was still in the bedroom of the apartment with the glass wall. And the girl who was bending over him was a complete stranger.

As he glared at her she stepped back from him and bent over a small machine. Her profile was to him, intent now and almost girlish in the anxiety that was there. Something must have gone wrong, for she began to curse in a most ungirlish fashion in a low tone. Abruptly, in a kind of desperation, she looked at him.

"For — sake"—Cargill didn't get the word—"don't just sit there. Come over here and pull on this jigger. We've got to get out of here."

He was a man who was trying to grasp many things at once. His gaze flicked apprehensively toward the open door.

"Sssssh!" he whispered instinctively.

The girl's eyes followed his gaze. "Don't worry about them—yet. But quick now!"

Cargill came heavily. His mind held him down. Her presence baffled him.

He knelt beside her—and grew aware of the faint perfume that emanated from her body. It gave him a heady sensation. For a moment, the tiny pin she was tugging at wavered in his vision. And then once more the girl spoke.

"Grab it," she said, "and pull hard."

Cargill sat there. The expression on his face must have penetrated to her at last for she paused and looked at him hard.

"Oh, mud," she said—it sounded like "mud"—"tell mother all about it. What's eating you?"

He couldn't help it. His mind was twisting, turning, writhing with doubts and fears.

"Who are you?" he mumbled.

The girl sagged back. "I get it," she said. "Everything's too fast. You haven't had time to think. You poor grud you." It sounded like "grud." She was shrugging. "Fine, we'll stay here until one of the Shadows comes."

"The what?"

The girl moaned. "Oh, Mud, won't I ever learn to keep my mouth shut. I've started him off again."

Her tone cut him at last. A flush touched his cheeks.

"Blast you!" he said. "What's all this about? What are you doing here? What—?"

The girl held up one hand as if to defend herself from attack. "All right, all right," she said. "I give up. Let's sit down and have a cozy chat, shall we? My name is Ann Reece. I was born twenty-four years ago in a hospital. I spent my first year more or less lying on my back. Then—"

The anger she aroused in him acted like an astringent. It tightened his thoughts and pulled back a dozen wandering impulses into a sort of unity. His very intentness must have impressed her. She parted her lips as if to say something light. Then looked at him—and closed them again.

Then she said, "Maybe we're going to get somewhere, after all. All right, my friend, a minute ago I wouldn't have told you anything. You've been pulled out of the twentieth century to the—well, the present. And that's all I'm going to tell you about that. I belong to a group who are opposed to the Shadows. And I was sent here after you—"

She stopped. Her brows knitted. "Never mind! Now, please, don't ask me how we knew you were here. Don't ask any more questions. This machine brought me into this room in the heart of Shadow City and it will take the two of us out if you will unjam that pin.

"If you don't want to go with me, loosen the pin anyway, so that I can get to"—Cargill missed the word completely—"out of here. You can stay and be murdered for all of me. Now, please, the pin!"

Murdered! That did it. It wasn't that he had forgotten. It was the insensate wriggling of his brain that pushed that danger ino the background. He leaned forward, his fingers forming to take hold.

"Do I pull or push?" he breathed.

"Pull."

Cargill snatched at it. The first touch startled him. It was as if he had grasped a film of oil. His skin slid over the immense smoothness of it as if there was nothing there. He grabbed again, sweating abruptly with the realization of the problem.

"Jerk!" said the girl harshly.

He jerked. And felt the slight tug as it yielded a fraction of an inch.

"Got it!" It was his own voice, hoarse truimph.

The girl reached past him. "Quick,

grab that smooth bar." Even as she spoke her hand guided his. He snatched for a hold. Her hand clutched the same bar just above where he was clinging.

He remembered then a dull glow from the bulbous section near his face. His body tingled.

And then he was lying on a hard smooth floor in a large room.

CHAPTER III

Planiac Captive

CARGILL did not look at the girl immediately. He climbed gingerly to his feet and put his hand to his head. It was an instinctive gesture, part of his utter absorption with himself. He found no pain, no dizziness, no sense of unbalance.

Why he had expected such reaction he didn't know. The complete absence of unpleasant sensation made him feel better.

He began to brace up to the situation. With brightening eyes, he glanced around the room. It was bigger and higher than his first impression had indicated. It was made of marble and seemed to be an anteroom. Except for minor seating arrangements for temporary visitors it had virtually no furniture.

There was a high arched doorway at either long end of the room but in each case the doors merely opened onto a wide hallway that ran at right angles to them. A single large window to Cargill's left faced onto shrubbery, so he could not see what was beyond.

He was starting avidly for the window when he grew aware that the girl was watching him with an ironic smile.

Cargill stopped short and looked at her. "Why shouldn't I be curious?" he asked defensively.

"Go right ahead," she said. She giggled. "But you look funny."

He stared at her angrily. She was a much smaller girl than he had thought and somewhat older. He remembered her language and decided—either older than twenty-five or younger. And unmarried. Young married women with children watched their tongues.

And besides, they didn't go out risking their lives by joining exotic groups of adventurous rebels.

The shrewdness of the analysis pleased Cargill. It opened his taut mind a little wider. For the first time since leaving the cell, he thought, "Why, I'm way up in the future! And this time I'm free."

He had a sudden desperate desire to see everything before he was returned to the twentieth century. A will came, to know, to experience. He had a thrill of imminent pleasure. Once more he whirled toward the window.

Then once more stopped.

There was a memory in him of what the girl had said—"*Look funny.*"

He glared down at his body, naked except for a pair of something similar to gym shorts. It was not exactly indecent but Cargill felt irritated, as if he had been caught in an embarrassing position. His legs were hard and strong but they looked thinner than they actually were. He had never been at his best in a bathing suit.

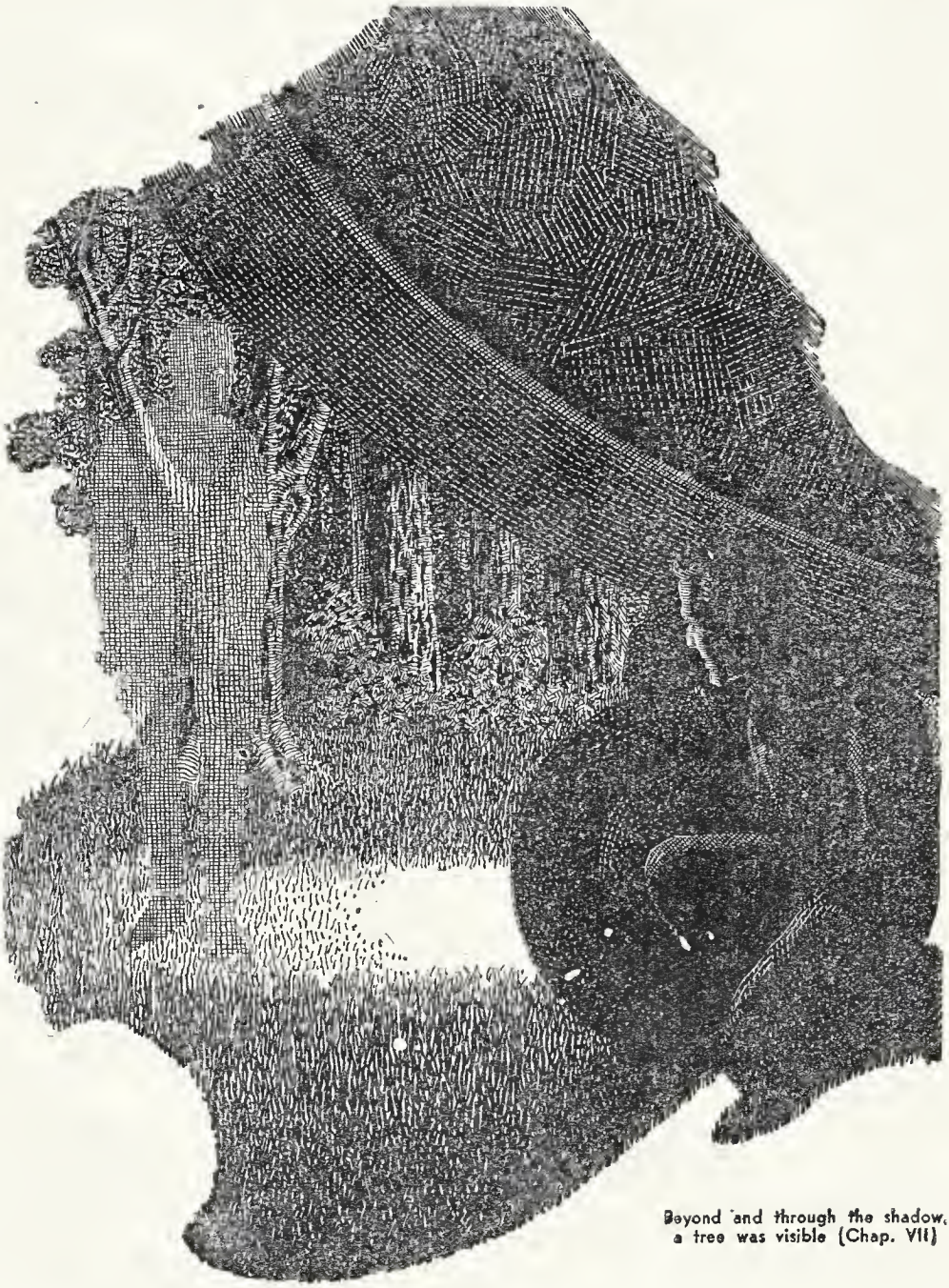
He said in genuine annoyance, "You could have had some clothes waiting for me here. It's getting chilly."

It was. Through the window he could see that it was also becoming darker. If he was still in California then the late afternoon sea breezes were probably blowing outside. Even in midsummer that meant coolness.

The girl said casually, "Oh, one of the men will bring you something. You're to leave here as soon as it becomes dark."

"Oh!" said Cargill.

He shook his head as if he would drive out the blur that was confusing him. All these minutes he had been standing here, adjusting to the simpler aspects of his new environment. They were important, it was true, but they were the tiniest segment of all that was happening to him.



Beyond and through the shadow, a tree was visible (Chap. VII)

The restlessness of his brain, which had already brought so many spasms of memory and forgetfulness, derived from several major facts. He was in this far future world because an inter-time psychological society was using him to cure one of their patients.

The morality of that was a little too deep for Cargill but just thinking about it brought a surge of fury. Who did they think they were, murdering him to soothe somebody else's upset nerves.

He fought down the anger, because that danger was temporarily behind him. Ahead was the mystery of the group that had rescued him and that, tonight, intended to take him—elsewhere.

Cargill parted his lips to ask the question that quivered in his mind when the girl said, "I'll leave you here to look around. I've got to go and talk to somebody. Do not follow me, please."

She was at the door to the left of the window before Cargill could find his voice.

"Just a minute," he said. "I want to ask some questions."

"I don't doubt it," said Ann Reece, with a low laugh. "You may ask *him* later." She turned, and was gone before he could speak again.

BEING alone soothed him. It was so marked a feeling that he realized how great had been the pressure upon him of the presence of other people while he was trying to adjust. Everybody else had plans about and for him. He had none for himself—except the window.

Peering out the window Cargill had the initial impression that he was looking onto a well-kept park. The impression changed. For through the lattice work of the shrubbery he could see a street.

It was such a street as men dream about in their moments of magical imagination. It wound through tall trees, among palms and fruit trees. It had shop windows fronting oddly shaped buildings that nestled among the greenery.

Hidden lights spread a mellow brightness into the curves and corners of that ungeometrical artists' street. The afternoon had become quite dark and every window glowed as from some inner warmth. He had a tantalizing vision of interiors that were different from anything he had ever seen.

All this was but a glimpse as viewed through the lattice work of a rose arbor.

Cargill drew back, trembling. He had had his first look at Los Angeles of hundreds of years in the future. It was an exhilarating experience.

He took another long look but what he could see was too fragmentary to satisfy his expanding need. He retreated from that fascinating view, and peered through the door beyond which the girl had disappeared. It was a hallway and a drab light was shining along it, a reflection from another doorway some score of feet to the right.

He hesitated. Ann Reece had forbidden him to follow her but she had made no threats. He was still standing there, undecided, when he grew aware that a man and a woman were talking in the lighted room.

Cargill strained his ears. But he could hear nothing of what was said. It was the tone of the man's voice that interested him. He seemed to be giving instructions and the girl was protesting.

Cargill recognized Ann Reece's voice but how subdued she was! Her reaction dictated his own. This was not the time to barge in on her—better to sit down and wait.

He was halfway across the room, heading toward a chair, when his foot struck something that clanged metallically. It took a moment in the almost darkness to recognize the machine that had brought him and the girl out of the glass-walled room.

Gazing at it, conscious of the wonder of it, Cargill had a wild thought—if he could take this machine and sneak off into the descending night, then he'd be free not only of his original captors but of the new group with their schemes.

That last was important, now that he had heard the sharply unpleasant voice

of the man in the next room.

Like a burglar in the night Cargill knelt beside the instrument. It was two-headed, like a barbell used by weight-lifters. In the gloom, his quick eyes searched for the "pin" that had caused the earlier trouble. It was not visible.

Carefully, using only the tips of his fingers, he pushed the bar, rolling it slowly. It was warm to his touch but showed no other animation. Cargill withdrew his fingers. This was not really the time to test its potency.

Uncertain, he climbed to his feet—and grew aware that footsteps were coming along the hallway. He turned to face the doorway. The footsteps entered the room, there was a rustling sound and the place blazed with light.

A Shadow shape stood in the doorway.

HE was walking. It was hard to understand how it had happened. but he could feel the pressure of the dirt under his shoes and the play of muscles in his legs as they moved back and forth.

For a long time, in the reflection of the flashlight in the hands of the girl, he watched the rise and fall of her heels. Every little while she kicked up loose soil and it was that which suddenly shocked the blur out of Cargill's mind.

The shadow figure, he thought. His legs continued their automatic movement but his brain flashed comprehension of his environment.

It was pitch dark. There was no sign anywhere of a city. He seemed to be walking along an unpaved rural road. Cargill looked up. But the sky must have been cloud-covered for he saw no stars and no moon.

Cargill groaned inwardly. What *could* have happened? One instant he was in a large marble anteroom inside a city, then the shadow shape had come in and seemed to examine him—one long look only. And then this—this dark road behind a silent companion.

"*Ann!*" said Cargill softly. "Ann Reece."

She did not turn or pause. "So you're coming out of it," she said.

Cargill wondered briefly just what it was he was coming out of. Amnesia, certainly—temporary amnesia. The thought faded. To a man who had been unconscious several times now another spasm of darkness didn't matter.

Here he was. That was what counted. "Where are we going?" he asked and his voice was quite normal.

The girl's voice oddly suggested she was shrugging. "Couldn't leave you in the city," she said.

"Why not?"

"The Shadows would get you."

The phrase had a rhythm that snatched Cargill's attention. The Shadows—will—get you. The Shadows will get you. He could almost imagine children being frightened by the threat.

His thought poised on the fact that at least one Shadow had seen him. He said as much. There was a pause. Then, "He's not—one of them."

"Who is he?"

"He has a plan"—she hesitated—"for fighting them."

Cargill's mind made a single, embracing leap. "Where do I fit into this plan?"

Silence answered. Cargill waited, then strode forward and fell in step beside her.

"Tell me," he said.

"It's very complicated." She still did not turn her head. "We had to have somebody from a time far past so the Shadows couldn't use their four-dimensional minds on him. *He* looked at you and said he couldn't tell what your future was. Here and there through history are individuals who are—complicated—like that. You're the one we selected."

"*Selected!*" Cargill exclaimed. Then he was silent. He had an abrupt impossible picture that everything that had happened to him had been planned. In his mind's eye he saw a drunken soldier being selected to wreck a car and kill a girl. No, wait, that couldn't be. He had got drunk that night deliberately. They couldn't have had anything to with that.

The fury of his speculation subsided.

The possibilities were too intricate. With a cold intentness he stared at the shadowed profile of Ann Reece.

"I want to know," he said, "what way I'm supposed to be used."

"I don't know," she said. "I'm only a pawn."

His fingers snatched at her arm. "Like heck you don't know," he said roughly. "Where are you taking me?"

THE fingers of her other hand tugged futilely at his hand. She struggled a little. "You're hurting my arm," she whimpered.

Cargill released her reluctantly. "You can answer my question."

"I'm taking you to a hiding place of ours. You'll be told there what's next." Her tone was reluctant.

Cargill pondered the possibilities and liked them less every second. A mysterious group intended to use him against beings they feared so violently that they had gone into remote history for somebody to fight their enemies.

"Look," he said frankly, "I don't like this situation at all. I don't think I'm going with you to this hiding place."

That did not seem to worry her. "Don't be silly," she said. "Where would you go?"

Cargill pondered that uneasily. Once in Germany his unit had withdrawn in disorder and he had been in enemy territory for two days. He could picture that a similar predicament here might be equally unhappy.

He looked down at himself, undecided. For some minutes, he had been aware that he had on clothes. In that dimness it was impossible to see what they were like but he felt warm and cozy. Surely, they wouldn't have given him conspicuous clothing. Abruptly, he made up his mind.

"I don't think," he said quietly, "that I'm going any farther in your direction. Good-by."

He stepped away from her and ran rapidly along the road, back the way they had come. After not more than ten seconds he plunged off the road and found himself scrambling through thick brush. Ann Reece's flashlight flared behind him obviously seeking him. But the reflections from the beam only made it easier for him to penetrate the brush.

He broke into a meadow and trotted across it—and then he was in brush again. For the first time then he heard her voice calling. "You fool, you! Come back!"

For several minutes, her words broke the spell of the night but he heard only snatches now.

Once he thought she said, "Watch out for the Planiacs!" But that didn't make sense.

He passed over the crest of a hill and thereafter heard her no more.

PURPOSEFULLY though carefully Cargill pressed on through the darkness. He grew startled by the extent of the wilderness but it was important that he keep moving. In the morning there might be a search for him and he had better be as far as possible from the road where he had left Ann Reece.

The night was dark, the sky continued sullen. The tangy smell of water warned him that he was approaching either a river or a lake. Cargill turned aside. He was crossing what seemed to be an open space when, out of the night, the beam of a flashlight focussed on him.

A girl's high-pitched voice said, "Darn you, I've got my — on you." He didn't get the word. It sounded like spitter. "Put up your hands."

In the reflections of the flashlight, Cargill glimpsed a dull metal gadget that looked like nothing else than an elongated radio tube. It pointed at him steadily.

The girl raised her voice in a yell. "Hey, pa, I've caught myself a —" The word sounded like *wiener* but Cargill rejected that. The girl went on excitedly, "Come on, pa, and help me get him aboard."

Afterwards, Cargill realized he should have tried to escape at that moment. It was the unnatural weapon that held him indecisive. Had it been an

ordinary gun he'd have dived off into the darkness—or so he told himself when it was too late.

Before he could decide a roughly dressed man loped out of the darkness. "Good work, Lela," he said, "you're a smart girl."

Cargill had a flashing glimpse of a lean, rapacious, bearded countenance. And then the man had taken up a position behind him and was jabbing another of the tubelike weapons into him.

"Get going, stranger, or I'll spit you."

Cargill started forward reluctantly. Ahead of him a long, snub-nosed snub-tailed structure loomed up vaguely out of the darkness. The light from the flash seared across it, sending back glassy reflections. And then—

"Follow Lela through that door."

There was no escape now. The man and the gun crowded behind him. Cargill found himself in a large dimly lighted room, amazingly well constructed and looking both cozy and costly. Then he was being urged across the carpeted floor, past a comfortable lounge into a narrow corridor and toward a tiny room that was even more dimly lighted than the first one.

A few moments later, while the man glowered in the doorway, the girl fastened a chain around Cargill's right and left ankles. A key clicked twice, then she was drawing back, saying, "There's a cot in that corner."

His two captors retreated along the corridor toward the brighter light, the girl babbling happily about having "caught one of them at last."

The man said, "Maybe we'd better cast adrift. Maybe there's more of them."

The light in Cargill's room went out. There was a jerk and then slow upward movement. Cargill thought, amazed, An airship!

His mind jumped back to what Ann Reece had shouted at him—"*Watch out for the Planiacs!*" Had she meant—this? Carefully, in the darkness he edged towards the cot the girl had indicated. He reached it and sank down on it wearily.

He spent about a minute fumbling over the chain with his fingers. The metal was hard, the chain itself just over a foot long, an excellent length for hobbling a man.

He was suddenly too tired to think about it. He lay down and must have slept immediately.

CHAPTER IV

Life with Lela

CARGILL had a lazy sensation of drifting along. For some reason he resisted waking up and kept sinking back into the darkness. Throughout that early dreamy stage he had no memory of what had happened or of where he was.

Gradually however he grew conscious of motion underneath him. He stirred and felt the chain clasps against his ankles. That jarred. That brought the beginning of alarm. With a start he woke up.

His eyes took in the curving metal ceiling, and all too swiftly he remembered. He reached down and touched the chain. It was cool and hard and convincing to his touch. It gave him an empty feeling.

And then, just as he was about to sit up, he realized he was not alone. He started to turn his head, caught a glimpse of what was there and barely in time brought his hands up in front of his face.

A whip cracked across his fingers, and licked at his neck with a flamelike intensity. "Get up you lazy good-for-nothing." The man who stood in the doorway was already drawing the whip back for another blow.

With a gasp Cargill swung his legs from the cot to the floor. In black rage he was about to launch himself at the other when the metallic rattle of the chain reminded him that he was desperately handicapped. That dimmed his fury and brought a sense of disaster.

Once more the whip struck at him. Cargill ducked and managed to get part of the blow on the sleeve of his coat. The thin sharp end flicked harmlessly past his shoulder against the metal wall.

Again the whip was drawn back.

He had already, blurrily, recognized his assailant as the man who had been with the girl the night before. Seen in the light of day he was a scrawny slovenly individual about forty years old. Several days' growth of beard darkened his face. His lips were thin.

His eyes had a curiously crafty expression and his face was a mask of bad temper. He wore a pair of greasy trousers and his filthy shirt, which was open at the neck, revealed a flat hairy chest.

He stood with an animal-like snarl on his face. "Darn your hide, get going."

Cargill thought: If he tries to hit me again, I'll rush him.

Aloud he temporized. "What do you want me to do?"

That seemed to add new fury to the man's anger. "I'll learn you what I want!"

The whip came up and it would have flashed down except for one thing. Cargill lunged from the cot and flung himself across the intervening space. The violent impact of their coming together nearly took his breath away but it smashed the other against the metal door jamb.

He let out a screech and tried to pull back. But Cargill had him now. With one hand he clutched the man's shirt. With the other hand, clenched, he struck at the thin, bony jaw.

It was a knockout. A limp body collapsed toward the floor. Cargill followed, kneeling awkwardly and with trembling fingers started to search the other's pockets.

From farther along the corridor, the girl's voice said, "All right, put up your hands or I'll spit you."

Cargill jerked up, tensed for action. He hesitated as he saw the weapon, then reluctantly drew back from the man's body. Stiffly, he sat down on the cot.

The girl walked forward, and dug the toe of her shoe into her father's ribs. "Get up, you fool," she said.

The man stirred, and sat up. "I'll kill him," he mumbled. "I'll murder that blasted—" It still sounded like *wiener*.

The girl was contemptuous. "You aren't going to kill anybody. You asked for a kick in the teeth and you got it. What did you want him to do?"

The man stood up groggily, and felt his jaw. "These darn Tweeners," he said, "make me sick with their sleeping in, and not knowing what to do."

The girl said coldly, "Don't be such a fool, Pa. He hasn't been trained yet. Do you expect him to read your mind?" She squeezed past him, and came into the little room. "And besides, you keep your dirty hands off him. I caught him, and I'll do any beating that's necessary. Give me that whip."

"Look, Lela Bouvy," said her father, "I'm the boss of this floater and don't you forget it." But he handed her the whip and said sullenly, "All I want is some breakfast and I want it quick."

"You'll get it. Now beat it." She motioned imperiously. "I'll do the rest."

The man turned and slouched out of sight.

The girl gestured with her thumb. "All right, you, into the kitchen."

Cargill hesitated, half-minded to resist. But the word, kitchen, conjured thoughts of food. He realized he was tremendously hungry. Silently he climbed to his feet and hobbled clumsily through the door she indicated.

He was thinking, These creatures could keep me chained up here from now on.

The despair that came was like a weight, more constricting than the chain that bound him.

THE kitchen proved to be a narrow corridor between thick translucent walls. It was about ten feet long and at the far end was a closed transparent door, beyond which he could see machinery. Both the kitchen and the machine room were bright with the light that flooded through the translucent walls.

Cargill glanced around, puzzled. There was no sign of a stove or of any standard cooking equipment. He saw no food, no dishes, no cupboards. He looked for lines in the glasslike walls. There were hundreds, horizontal, vertical, diagonal, curving and circular. They seemed to have no purpose. If any of them marked off a panel or a door he couldn't see it.

He turned questioningly to the girl. She spoke first. "No clouds this morning. We'll be able to get all the heat we want."

He watched, interested, as she reached up with one hand, spread it wide and touched the top of the wall where it curved toward the ceiling. Only her thumb and little finger actually touched the glass. With a quick movement she ran her hand along parallel to the floor, lightly.

A thick slab of the glass broke free along an intricate series of lines and noiselessly slid down into a slot. Cargill craned his neck. From where he stood he could just see that there was a limpidly transparent panel inside, behind which were shelves. What was on the shelves, he could not see.

The girl slid the panel casually sideways. For a moment then her body hid what she was doing. She drew back holding a plate with raw fish and potatoes on it. It looked like trout, and surprisingly it had been cleaned. It was surprising to Cargill because neither Bouvy nor his daughter looked as if they were capable of doing anything in advance.

He shrewdly suspected the presence of kitchen gadgets that could scale and fillet a fish automatically.

The girl took a few steps toward him. Once more she ran her little finger and thumb along the upper wall. Another section of that sunlit wall slid down and there was a second panel with shelves behind it. The girl opened the panel, and placed the plate on one of the shelves.

As she closed the panel a faint steam rose from the fish. It turned a golden brown. The potatoes lost their hard whiteness, and visibly underwent the chemical change to a cooked state.

"That'll do, I guess," said Lela Bouvy. She added, "You better get yourself a bite."

She took out the plate in her bare hands, paused at the refrigerator to take out an apple and a pear from a bottom shelf and walked out, still carrying the plate.

Cargill was left alone in the kitchen. By the time she returned for her own breakfast, he had eaten an apple, cooked himself some chicken legs and potatoes and was busily eating when she paused in the doorway.

SHE was rather a pretty thing if you allowed for a certain sullenness of expression. So it seemed to Cargill. Her hair was not too well combed but it was not tangled and it had a kind of a pleasant shine that showed some attention had been lavished on it.

Her eyes were a hot blue, her lips full

[*Turn page*]

and her chin came to a point. She wore dungarees and an open-necked shirt which partly exposed a very firm tanned bust.

She could have been very pretty.

She said, with a suspicious tone in her voice, "How did a smart-looking Tweener like you come to get caught so easy?"

Cargill swallowed a vast mouthful of potato in several quick gulps, and said, "I'm not a Tweener."

The hot blue of her eyes smoldered with easy anger. "What kind of a smarty answer is that?"

Cargill cleaned up what was left on the plate and said, "I'm being honest with you. I'm not a Tweener."

She frowned. "Then what are you?" She stiffened. The anger went out of her eyes. They seemed to change color. A fear blue, slightly but curiously different. She whispered, "Not a Shadow?"

Before he could pretend or even decide not to she answered her own question. "Of course, you aren't. A Shadow would know all about this ship and how the kitchen works without having to watch me first. They fix our ships for us floater folk when the repair job is too big for us to figure out."

The moment for pretense, whatever its possibilities might have been, was past. Cargill said grudgingly, "No, I'm not a Shadow."

The girl's frown had deepened. "But a Tweener would've known that too." She looked at him warily, "What's your name?"

"Morton Cargill."

"Where are you from?"

Cargill told her and watched those expressive eyes of hers change color again. Finally she nodded. "One of those, eh?" She seemed disturbed. "We get a reward for people like you."

She broke off. "What did you do—back where you came from—to start the Shadows after you?"

Cargill shrugged. "Nothing." He had no intention of launching into a detailed account of the Marie Chanette incident.

Once more, the blue eyes were flashing. "Don't you dare lie to me," she said. "All I've got to do is to tell Pa that you're a getaway and that'll cook your goose."

Cargill said with all the earnestness he could muster, "I can't help that. I really don't know." He hesitated, then said, "What year is this?"

The moment he had asked the question he felt breathless.

CHAPTER V

A Woman's Loud Voice

HE hadn't thought about it before. He hadn't had time. The clock in the glass-walled room in Shadow City had indicated that it was May 6th but not what year it was. Everything had happened too swiftly. Even his blurred questions to Ann Reece during those first minutes after her arrival had been so weighted with emotion that the possibilities of being here in the future hadn't really penetrated.

Which future? What year? What had happened during the centuries that must have passed? Where? How? Who? He caught his whirling mind, fastened it down, brought it to focus. The most important fact was—what year?

Lela Bouvy shrugged, and said, "Two Thousand Three Hundred and Ninety-One."

Cargill ventured, "What I can't understand is how the world has changed so completely from my time." He described the United States at the end of World War Two.

The girl was calm. "It was natural. Most people want to be free, not to have to live in one place or to be tied to some stupid work. The world isn't completely free yet. We floater folk are the only lucky ones so far."

Cargill had his own idea of a freedom where the individuals depended on somebody else to repair their machines. But he was interested in information, not in exploding false notions.

He said cautiously, "How many floater folk are there?"

"About fifteen million."

She spoke glibly but Cargill let the figure pass.

"And the Tweeners?" he asked.

"Three million or so." She was contemptuous. "The cowards live in cities."

"What about the Shadows?"

"A hundred thousand, maybe a little more or less. Not much."

Cargill was left alone most of the rest of the day. He saw Lela briefly again when she came in and prepared lunch for herself and her father.

It was not till afternoon that he started to think seriously about what he had learned. The population collapse depressed him. It made the big fight of life seem suddenly less important.

All the eager ambition of the Twentieth Century was now proved valueless, destroyed by a catastrophe that derived not from physical force, but apparently from a will to escape responsibility. Perhaps the pressures of civilization had been too great. People had fled from it as from a plague the moment a real opportunity occurred.

IT WAS growing dark in the kitchen when Cargill realized the ship was sinking to a lower level. He didn't realize just how low until he heard the metal shell under him whisk against the upper branches of trees.

A minute later there were a thud and a shock. The floater dragged for several feet along the ground, and then came to a stop. Cargill grew conscious of a muffled roaring sound outside.

Lela came into the room. Or rather, she walked straight through to the kitchen. Cargill had a sudden suspicion of what she planned to do and lurched to his feet. He was too late. The door of the engine room was open, and the girl was in the act of lowering a section of the glass wall.

As he watched she eased down a hinged section of the outer wall and stepped through out of sight. A damp sea breeze blew into Cargill's face and now he heard the roar of the surf.

The girl came back after about a minute and paused in his room. "You can go outside if you want," she said. She hesitated. Then, "Don't try to run away. You won't get far, and Pa might burn you with a spit gun."

Cargill said ruefully, "Where would I run to? I guess you folks are stuck with me."

He watched her narrowly to see how she took that. She seemed relieved. It was not a positive reaction but it was suggestive. It fitted with his feeling that Lela Bouvy would welcome the presence of someone other than her father.

As he hobbled through the kitchen a moment later Cargill silently justified the plan he had of worming his way into the girl's confidence. A prisoner in his situation was entitled to use every trick and device necessary to his escape.

He did not pause at the engine room door—how it opened, he would discover in the morning. He manipulated his chained legs down a set of steps—part of the outer wall, folded out and down on hinges.

A moment later he stepped onto a sandy beach.

They spent most of the evening catching crabs and other sea creatures that crowded around a light which Bouvy lowered into the water. It was a wild seacoast, rocky except for brief stretches of sand. A primeval forest came down in places almost to the edge of the rock that overlooked the restless sea below.

Lela dipped up the tiny creatures with a little net and tossed them onto a pile where Cargill with his fingers separated the wanted from the unwanted. It was easy to pick out and throw back the ones that Lela pointed out as inedible, to toss the others into a pail.

Periodically, the girl took a pailful of the delicacies back to the floater.

She was in a visible state of exhilaration. Her eyes flashed with excitement in the light reflections, her face was alive with color. Her lips parted, her nostrils dilated. Several times when Bouvy had moved farther along the

beach and the sound of the surf prevented her father from hearing she shrieked at Cargill, "Isn't it fun? Isn't this the life?"

"Wonderful!" Cargill yelled back. Once he added, "I've never seen anything like it."

That seemed to satisfy her and it was true up to a point. There was a pleasure to open-air living. What she didn't seem to understand was that there was more to being alive than living outdoors. Civilized life had many facets, not just one.

SHE came into his part of the ship a dozen times the next day. Cargill, who had unsuccessfully sought the secret of how to open the engine-room door, finally asked her how it was done. She showed him without hesitation. It was a matter of touching both door jambs simultaneously.

When she had gone Cargill headed straight for the engine room, paused for a moment to study the engine—that proved a futile process, since it was completely closed in—and then slid the wall section into the floor and looked down at the world beneath.

The world that sped by below was a wilderness, but a curious sort. As far as the eye could see were the trees and shrubbery associated with land almost untouched by the hand and metal of man. But standing amid weeds and forests were buildings.

Even from a third of a mile up those that Cargill saw looked uninhabited. Brick chimneys lay tumbled over on faded roofs. Windows seen from a distance yawned emptily, or gazed up at him with a glassy stare. Barns sagged unevenly and here and there the wood or brick or stone had completely collapsed and the unpainted ruin drooped wearily to the ground.

In the beginning the only structures he saw were farmhouses and their outbuildings. But abruptly a town flowed by underneath. Now the effect of uninhabited desolation was clearly marked—tottering fences, cracked pavement overgrown by weeds and the same design of disintegration in the houses.

When they had passed over a second long-abandoned town Cargill closed the panel that had concealed the window and returned uneasily to his cot.

Coming as he did from a world in which virtually every acre of tillable land was owned and used by somebody, he was shocked by the way vast areas had been allowed to revert to a primitive state. He tried to picture from what the girl had told him and from what he had observed how it might have happened. But that got him nowhere.

He wondered if the development of machinery had finally made agriculture unnecessary. If it had, then this was still a transition stage. The time would come when these ghost farms and ghost towns and perhaps ghost cities would return to the soil from which they had, in their complex fashion, sprung. The time would come when these costly monuments of an earlier civilization would be as gone and forgotten as the cities of antique times.

They spent two more evenings fishing. On the fourth day Cargill heard a woman's loud voice talking from the living-room. It was an unpleasant voice and it startled him.

Curiously he had never thought of these people as being in communication with anyone else. But the woman was unmistakably giving instructions to the Bouvy father and daughter. Almost as soon as she had stopped talking Cargill felt the ship change its course. Toward dark Lela came in.

"We'll be camping with other people tonight," she said. "So you watch yourself." She sounded fretful and she went out without waiting for him to reply.

Cargill considered the possibilities with narrowed eyes. After four days of being in hobble chains, with no sign that they would ever come off, he was ready for a change.

"Basically, all I've got to do," he told himself, "is catch two people off guard." And he wouldn't have to be gentle about it either.

"Careful," he thought. "Better not

build my hopes too high."

Nevertheless, it seemed to him that the presence of other people might actually produce an opportunity for escape.

CHAPTER VI

Carmean

THROUGH the open doorway Cargill caught glimpses of the outside activity. Men walked by carrying fishing rods. The current of air that surged through brought the tangy odor of river and the damp pleasant smell of innumerable growing things.

It grew darker rapidly. Finally Cargill could stand it no longer. He stood up and, taking care not to trip over his chain, went outside and sank down on the grass.

The scene that spread before him had an idyllic quality. Here and there under the trees ships were parked. There were at least a dozen that he could see and it seemed to him that the lights of still others showed through the thick foliage along the shore. The sound of voices floated on the air and somehow they no longer sounded harsh or crude.

There was a movement in the darkness near him. Lela Bouvy settled down on the grass beside him. She said breathlessly, "Kind of fun living like this, isn't it?"

Cargill hesitated and then, somewhat to his surprise, found himself agreeing.

"There's a desire in all of us," he thought, "to return to nature."

The will to relax, the impulse to lie on green grass, to listen to the rustling of leaves in an almost impalpable breeze —all that he could feel in himself. He also had the basic urge that had driven these Planiacs to abandon the ordered slavery of civilization. He found himself saddened by the realization that the abandonment included a return to ignorance.

He said aloud, "Yes, it's pretty nice."

A tall powerful-looking woman strode out of the darkness. "Where's Bouvy?" she said. A flashlight in her hand winked on and glared at Lela and Cargill. Its bright stare held steady for seconds longer than was necessary.

"Well, I'll be double darned," the woman's voice said from the intense blackness behind the light, "little Lela's gone and found herself a man."

Lela snapped, "Don't be a bigger fool than you have to be, Carmean."

The woman laughed uproariously. "I heard you had a man," she said finally, "and now that I get a look at him I can see you've done yourself proud."

Lela said indifferently, "He doesn't mean a thing to me."

"Yeah?" said Carmean derisively. Abruptly she seemed to lose interest. The beam of her flashlight swept on and left them in darkness. The light focussed on Pa Bouvy sitting in a chair against the side of the ship. "Oh, there you are," said the woman.

"Yup!"

The big woman walked over. "Git up and give me that chair," she said. "Haven't you got no manners?"

"Watch your tongue, you old buzzard," said Bouvy pleasantly. But he stood up and disappeared into the ship. He emerged presently with another chair.

During his absence the woman had picked up the chair in which he had been sitting and carried it some twenty-five feet along the river's bank.

She yelled at Bouvy, "Bring that contraption over here! I want to talk to you privately. Besides, I guess maybe those two love-birds want to be alone." She guffawed.

Lela said in a strained voice to Cargill, "That's Carmean. She's one of the bosses. She thinks she's being funny when she talks like that."

Cargill said, "What do you mean, one of the bosses?"

The girl sounded surprised. "She tells us what to do." She added hastily, "Of course, she can't interfere in our private life."

CARGILL digested that for a moment. During the silence he could hear Carmean's voice at intervals. Only an occasional word reached him. Several times she said, "Tweeners" and "Shadows." Once she said, "It's a cinch."

There was an urgency in her voice that made him want to hear what she was saying but presently he realized the impossibility of making sense out of stray words.

He relaxed and said, "I thought you folks lived a free life? Without anybody to tell you what to do and where to get off."

"You got to have rules," said Lela. "You got to know where to draw the line. What you can do and what you can't do." She added earnestly, "But we are free. Not like those Tweeners in their cities." The last was spoken scornfully.

Cargill said, "What happens if you don't do what she says?"

"You lose the benefits."

"Benefits?"

"The preachers won't preach to you," said Lela. "Nobody gives you food. The Shadows won't fix your ship." She added casually, "And things like that."

Cargill whistled softly under his breath. The power of the church of the Middle Ages couldn't have been any greater. This was excommunication with a capital E and ostracism in a rather ultimate fashion.

He said a. last, "So even the Shadows recognize her authority. Why?"

"Oh, they just want us to behave."

"But you can capture Tweeners?"

The girl hesitated. Then, "Nobody seems to worry about a Tweener," she said.

Cargill nodded. He recalled his attempts to get information from her during the past few days. Apparently she hadn't even thought of these restraining influences on her life. Now, though she seemed unaware of it, she had given him a picture of an incredibly rigid social structure.

Surely, he thought desperately, surely he could figure out some way to take advantage of this situation. He moved irritably and the chain rattled, reminding him that all the plans in the world could not directly affect metal.

Carmean brought her chair back to the ship, closely followed by Bouvy. She set it down and then walked slowly over and stood in front of Cargill. She half-turned and said, "I could use a husky guy around, Bouvy."

"He isn't for sale." That was Lela, curtly.

"I'm speaking to your Pa, kid, so watch your tongue."

"You heard the girl," said Bouvy. "We've got a good man here." His tone was cunning, rather than earnest. He sounded as if he were prepared to haggle but wanted the best of the deal.

Carmean said, "Don't you go getting commercial on me." She added darkly, "You'd better watch out. These Tweeners haven't got any religion when it comes to a good-looking girl."

Bouvy grunted but when he spoke he still sounded good-humored. "Don't give me any of that. Lela's going to stick with her Pa and be a help to him all her life. Aren't you, honey?"

"You talk like a fool, Pa. Better keep your mouth shut."

"She's fighting hard," said Carmean slyly. "You can see what's in the back of *her* mind."

Bouvy sat down in one of the chairs. "Just for the sake of the talk, Carmean," he said, "what'll you give for him?"

Cargill had listened to the early stages of the transaction with a shocked sense of unreality. But swiftly now he realized that he was actually in process of being sold.

It emphasized, if emphasis was needed, that to these Planiacs he was a piece of property, a chattel, a slave who could be forced to menial labor or whipped or even killed without any one being concerned. His fate was a private affair which would trouble no one but himself.

"Somebody's going to get gypped," he told himself angrily. A man as determined as he was to escape would be a bad bargain for Carmean or anyone else. In the final issue, he thought, he'd

take all necessary risks and he had just enough front-line army experience to make that mean something.

THE bargaining was still going on. Carmean offered her own ship in return for Cargill and the Bouvy ship. "It's a newer model," she urged. "It's good for ten years without any trouble or fussing."

Bouvy's hesitation was noticeable. "That isn't a fair offer," he said plaintively. "The Shadows will give you all the new ships you want. So you aren't offering me anything that means anything to you."

Carmean retorted, "I'm offering you what I can get and you can't."

"It's too much trouble," said Bouvy. "I'd have to move all our stuff."

"Your stuff!" The big woman was contemptuous. "Why, that junk isn't worth carting out! And besides, I've got a ship full of valuables over there."

Bouvy was quick. "It's a deal if you change ship for ship with everything left aboard."

Carmean laughed curtly. "You must take me for a bigger fool than I look. I'll leave you more stuff than you've ever seen but I'm taking plenty out."

Lela, who had been sitting silently, said, "You two are just talking. It makes no difference what you decide. I caught him and he's mine. That's the law and you just try to use your position as boss to change it, Carmean."

Even in the darkness, Carmean's hesitation was apparent. Finally she said, "We'll talk about this some more tomorrow morning. Meantime, Bouvy, you'd better teach this kid of yours some manners."

"I'll do just that," said Pa Bouvy and there was a vicious undertone in his voice. "Don't you worry, Carmean. You've bought yourself a Tweener and if we have any trouble in the morning there's going to be a public whipping here of an ungrateful daughter."

Carmean laughed in triumph. "That's the kind of talk I like to hear," she said. "The old man's standing up for himself at last."

Still laughing, she walked off into the darkness. Pa Bouvy stood up.

"Lela!"

"What?"

"Get that Tweener inside the ship and chain him up good."

"Okay, Pa." She climbed to her feet. "Get a move on," she said to Cargill.

Without a word, moving slowly because of the chain, Cargill went inside and lay down on his cot.

It must have been several hours later when he awoke, aware that somebody was tugging at the chain.

"Careful," whispered Lela Bouvy, "I'm trying to unlock this. Hold still."

Cargill, tense, did as he was told. A minute later he was free. The girl's whisper came again, "You go ahead—through the kitchen. I'll be right behind you. Careful."

Cargill was careful.

CHAPTER VII

Shadow Man

CARGILL lay in the dark on the grass with no particular urge to move. The feel of being free had not yet taken firm root inside him. The night had become distinctly cooler and most of the machines were dark. Only one ship still shed light from a half-open doorway and that was more than a hundred feet along the river bank from where he crouched.

Cargill considered his first move. More quickly now he began to realize his new situation. He need only creep out of this camp and then go where he pleased. At least it seemed for a moment as if that was all he had to do. He felt reluctant actually to do it.

In the darkness progress would be difficult and morning might find him still dangerously close to the Planiacs. He imagined himself being seen from the air. He pictured a search party with an air support, finding him within a few hours after dawn. The possibilities

chilled him and brought the first change in his purpose.

"If I could steal one of these ships," he thought indecisively.

There was a faint sound beside him and then the whispered voice of Lela Bouvy said, "I want you to take her ship. That's the only way I'll let you go."

Cargill turned in the darkness. Her words implied that she had a weapon to force him to do what she wanted. But the darkness under the trees was too intense for him to see if she were armed. He didn't have to be told that "her ship" referred to Carmean's. His response must have been too slow. Once more Lela spoke.

"Get going."

Carmean's ship was as good as any, Cargill decided. He whispered, "Which is hers?"

"The one that's got a light."

"Oh!"

Some of his gathering determination faded. Carmean asleep and Carmean awake were two different propositions. In spite of his qualms he began to move forward. There was such a thing as investigating the situation before making up his mind. A few minutes later he paused behind a tree about a dozen feet from Carmean's ship.

The dim light that streamed from the partly open doorway made a vague patch of brightness on the grass. Near the edge of that dully lighted area Carmean herself sat on the grass.

Cargill, who had been about to start forward again, saw her just in time. He stopped with a gulp and it was only slowly that the tension of that narrow escape left him. He glanced back finally and saw Lela in the act of moving toward him. Hastily Cargill headed her off.

He drew her into the shelter of a leafy plant, explained the situation, and asked, "Is there anybody else in the ship?"

"No. Her last husband fell off the ship three months ago. At least that was what Carmean said happened. She's been looking for another one ever since but none of the men'll have her. That's why she wanted you."

It was a new idea to Cargill. He had a momentary mental picture of himself in the role of a chained husband. It shocked him. He could feel himself stiffening to the necessities of this situation.

The sooner he got away from these people, the better off he'd be. And in view of their casually ruthless plans for him he need feel no sense of restraint.

He whispered to Lela, "I'll jump on her and bang her over the head. Have you got anything I can hit her with?" He felt savage and merciless. He hoped the girl would give him her gun. Just for an instant then, as she slipped something metallic into his hand, he thought she had done so.

She whispered fiercely, "That's from the edge of your cot. It'll look as if you got free and took it along as a weapon."

The logic of that was not entirely convincing to Cargill but he saw that she was trying to convince herself. And it was important that there be some kind of explanation for his escape. Bouvy would undoubtedly be furious with her.

Cautiously Cargill stole forward. As he reached the shelter of the tree near Carmean the big woman climbed heavily to her feet.

"So you finally got here, Grannis," she said to somebody Cargill couldn't see.

"Yes," said a voice from the other side of the tree behind which Cargill crouched, rigid now. The man's voice went on, "I couldn't make it any sooner."

"So long as you could make it at all," said Carmean indifferently. "Let's go inside."

Just what he expected then, Cargill had no idea. He had a brief, bitter conviction that he ought to attack both the stranger and Carmean and then—

A Shadow walked into the lighted area.

MORTON CARGILL stayed where he was, behind the tree. His first feeling of intense disappointment yielded to the realization that there was still

hope. This was a secret midnight meeting. The Shadow who had come to talk to Carmean would leave presently and there'd be another opportunity to seize the ship.

He started cautiously to back away and then he stopped. It seemed to him suddenly that perhaps he ought to overhear what was being said. He was planning how he would do it when Lela slipped up behind him.

"What's the matter?" she whispered angrily. "Why are you standing there?"

"Sh-h-hh!" said Cargill. That was almost automatic. He was intent on his own purposes, acutely conscious now that anything that concerned the Shadows could concern him.

"I've got to remember," he told himself, "that I was brought here by someone who intended to use me."

His capture by Lela was an unfortunate incident not on the schedule of the original planners. He paid no attention to the girl but slipped from behind the tree and headed for Carmean's floater. He reached the door safely and flattened himself against the metal wall beside it.

Almost immediately, he had his first disappointment. The voices inside were too far away for him to hear. As had happened when Carmean talked to Pa Bouvy earlier, only occasional words came through.

Once, a man's voice said, "The attack must be carefully timed."

A little later, Carmean's voice lifted to audible pitch on a triumphant note. "Don't worry about us. We'll blast them out of their—"

Cargill thought she said "cities," but he couldn't be sure. Abruptly the voices came closer.

"All right now," the Shadow was saying, "let's go and get this man Cargill. I won't feel right until he's safely in our hands again and—"

Cargill waited for no more. Swiftly, but cautiously, he backed away along the side of the ship. In the darkness under the curving nose of the machine he crouched tensely. The light on the grass in front of the door brightened as the door was opened wider. The Shadow stepped out.

Beyond and through him, a tree was visible. He had a head and body shaped like a man and as he paused, half turning, waiting for Carmean, his eyes were clearly visible. They were shadow eyes for they did not glitter in the light. But dull though they were they were unmistakably eyes.

Carmean came out. She said, "I want to get this straight. I keep this guy Cargill in my ship until I hear from you?" There was satisfaction in her tone.

"Exactly," was the grim reply. "And if I send word bring him without delay. You'll get all the men you want when the time comes." He broke off. "Which ship?"

Cargill didn't catch what Carmean said but she must have indicated the direction. They moved off, out of the spread of light into the greater darkness.

A minute passed and then Lela came hurrying from her hiding place. She paused breathless in the darkness beside him.

"Quick," she whispered. "We'll have to get aboard and leave."

"We?" said Cargill. There was no time to talk about the implication of the plural. Clear and loud on the night air came the sound of a knock on metal and then Carmean's voice.

"Bouvy, open up! It's me."

The discovery of his escape was seconds away. Cargill reached the doorway of Carmean's ship, paused only long enough to let Lela get in ahead of him and then he was inside.

"You get the ship into the air," he whispered. "I'll hold them off here." He wasn't sure just what he would do against guns but he had a vague notion that it was important to keep the door open until the ship was actually rising into the air.

There was a prolonged pause and then—the ship tugged slightly under him.

Cargill held his breath, counting the seconds as the floater drifted upward.

PRESENTLY, with shaking fingers, he closed the door and called to Lela, "Can you turn off the lights?"

There was silence, then darkness. Cautiously Cargill opened the door again and cautiously he peered out. The top of a tree glided by, only inches below. The slow way in which it moved past emphasized that the speed of these light-powered ships at night was negligible.

Lela's voice came faintly from forward.

"I'm trying to get her out over the river. There'll be more light there. Anybody following?"

Cargill couldn't be sure. He was looking down slantingly at a camp that was slowly coming to life. Even that minimum activity was hidden behind dense foliage. He saw splashes of light and there was the sound of excited voices. But if any ship rose up to follow them during those first minutes Cargill did not see it.

Under him the machine seemed to quicken its pace. He looked down and saw that they were over the river. And now he could understand Lela's purpose. The water was alive with light reflections.

He estimated that they were traveling at least ten miles an hour.

Less than a minute later the camp vanished behind a bend in the river and he saw it no more. He stayed where he was nevertheless for another five minutes.

At the end of that time he closed the door and headed for the all-room. It was somewhat larger than the similar room in the Bouvy's ship but it was functionally the same room. He glanced into the control room.

Lela was in the control chair. She did not look at him.

Cargill hesitated, then went back to the door that opened outside. He opened it, and spent the next hour gazing into the night.

The moon came up while he sat there and the ship accelerated perceptibly. They were still only a few feet above the forest.

CHAPTER VIII

Hope's End

CARGILL consciously thought that control of the sky floater would enable him to do what he wanted. The trouble was, what did he want. The weeks passed and he could not make up his mind.

For some reason he had become involved in a plot. If he made a move that would bring him out into the open the plotters would once more close in upon him, would try to force him to do their will.

After lunch one day Cargill found the restless feeling growing on him. There was an idea in the back of his mind, the beginning of purpose. The nature of that purpose made him uneasy but the idea, once it came, would not go away.

Unhappily, he went into the control room and sat down in front of the video plate. It was not the first time he had examined the machine or listened in to it. But now there was a plan in his mind.

As with the floater engine and other machinery, the TV and radio mechanism was completely inclosed—and so it was not possible to make an examination of the inner workings of the instrument. For a while Cargill simply tuned into conversations and into the one program that was on.

A Shadow station broadcast the program, which consisted of popular music of the jive variety. After each selection, a persuasive voice urged the listener to come to Shadow City and receive Shadow training.

To Cargill, who did not care for jazz, the "commercials" had been fascinating —in the beginning. Now he listened for a few moments to the repetitious music and then absently turned the dial. Occasionally, he adjusted to see if any pictures were being broadcast. He found several.

First, there was a man's coarse face and the man was saying, "Now look,

we've got to work this deal without any fooling."

Cargill listened long enough to the "deal" to find out that it had to do with a boss bargaining as to how much he would receive for a new floater, which had been turned over to him by the Shadows. Cargill noted down the man's name, the details of the transaction and made another adjustment.

The next picture showed the interior of a ship. Apparently, a broadcaster had been left on carelessly. Since only the bosses had TV broadcasting units Cargill presumed that he was gazing into a boss' control room. He saw no one, though he watched for several minutes.

A third picture featured a youth talking to a girl. He was saying, "Aw, c'mon, Jenny, you get your ma to put your floater down near ours tonight. Don't be one of these hard-to-get women."

There were other personal conversations. Cargill identified their nature and passed on. It was too early for the only television show broadcast by the Shadows. Not that he was any longer terrifically interested in it. It always featured the arrival of Tweeners and Planiacs at the terminal center just outside Shadow City, with emphasis on the Planiacs.

It was a man-in-the-street type of show in which a Shadow interrogator questioned Planiacs who had come to take Shadow training in response to the propaganda. When he had first heard the show Cargill had hoped the Shadows would actually picturize a part of their training program. So far they had not done so.

He was still not over his disappointment that these receivers were unable to tune in on programs broadcast from Tweener cities. It was very significant, of course. The Shadows were evidently making sure that no one else had the opportunity to control the floater folk.

Abruptly, Cargill shut off the instrument, and sat frowning. His purpose was like a fire, threatening to consume him. And yet, once he took the plunge, he'd be even more of a marked man than he was now.

From the nearby control chair, Lela said anxiously, "What's the matter, honey?"

Cargill said slowly, "We can't go on like this forever—with everybody against us. We've got to have somebody around who will help us in an emergency or if something goes wrong."

Lela nodded uneasily, said reluctantly, "I've been thinking about that once in a while."

"We've got to do more than think about it," said Cargill. "We've got to do something."

"What, for instance?"

Cargill leaned back in his chair, and closed his eyes. "Lela," he asked finally, "what do people think of Carmean? Do they like her?"

It was a question which she would not actually be able to answer, since she couldn't know what millions of people thought. Still, he could take that into account.

Lela said savagely, "Nobody likes Carmean. She's a skunk."

Cargill sighed but pressed on, "What about the other bosses? What do people think of them?"

"Why, you just put up with them," said Lela in a surprised tone. "There they are. They're part of life."

"I see," said Cargill with satisfaction.

She might not know it but that was a far more significant answer. It decided him.

He opened his eyes, and asked another question.

"Lela, have you ever heard of a revolution?"

She hesitated, frowning.

"You mean, where somebody starts a fight?"

Cargill smiled. "Something like that but it starts off with a barrage of propaganda. Then your supporters use infiltration tactics to get to key centers of control. Finally"—he smiled again—"the fight."

He turned back to the TV set. "Okay," he said. "We take the first step."

BY the fifth day of his broadcasts, Cargill began to have a queer feeling of unreality. He seemed to be talking into emptiness. For the first time in his life he understood how people must have felt in the early days of radio with only a microphone to stare at.

What he lacked was a Hooper rating. There was no mail to bring a picture of audience response, no surveys of any kind to encourage him. But in spite of his doubts he kept on.

Thirty days drifted by. On the morning of the thirty-first day, just as Cargill finished his propaganda talk, a man's face appeared on his TV plate. He was a cunning-looking individual about forty-five years old.

"I want to talk to you," he said.

A trap? Cargill's fingers hovered over the dial that would cut him off the air.

He hesitated and the stranger had time to say, "My name is Guthrie. I want to talk to you about this rabble-rousing you've been doing."

He looked and sounded like a boss. He was a typical rough older Planiac and his words were sweet music to Cargill. But it was not yet time to talk.

"I'm not interested," said Cargill.

He broke the connection.

From that moment he began to name places where his supporters should meet and get together. It was dangerous but then so was being alive. What would save the great majority from counteraction was that each floater was armed with a mounted spit gun.

The days passed. Late one afternoon, Lela came briefly out of the control room. "It's going to be dark by the time we get to the lake," she said.

Cargill smiled. "Which lake do you mean?" He added quickly. "Never mind. I'm just amazed constantly at the way you pick out these places."

"It isn't anything," said the girl. And she meant it. "I've been watching this country since I was a baby. I know it like the palm of my hand."

"Better, I'll wager," said Cargill.

They came in low over the trees and landed in a clearing with the aid of their searchlight. As Cargill started to open the door a spit gun flared in the darkness. What saved him was that he was behind the door. The energy spat past him and made a thunderous sound as it struck the metal corridor wall. The door smoked from the terrific heat. He had a sense of suffocation.

Under him the ship began to lift. And then, once more, there was a sun-like glare—only this time the blow was delivered farther back, near the rear of the machine. The floater faltered and, as Cargill got the door shut at last, sagged back to the ground. It struck with a jar unlike anything that Cargill had experienced during his life aboard. He hurried to the control room and found Lela manning their spit gun.

She was very pale. "Those blasted scum," she said, "have wrecked us."

The dawnlight filtered through the turgid glass. It was dull at first, little more than a lighter shade of darkness, but it grew bright. From the control room Cargill could see the dark areas outside lightening. To his right was the gray horizon of the lake with the far shore hazed in mist.

From where she sat, manning the ship's powerful spit-gun, Lela said, "It's bright enough now. Try and lift her again."

IT WAS a hope that had motivated their courage all through the long night—that morning would bring some life to the sluggish motors. The hope died a second later as Cargill eased in the power and pulled it all the way back. The ship did not even stir.

"We'll try it again," said Lela in a tired voice, "when the sun comes up."

Cargill rejected her hope. "Has your father any influence with the bosses?" he asked.

The girl shrugged. "Carmean kind of likes him."

Cargill silently wondered why. He said finally, "Maybe if we talked to them we could find out what they want."

From the conversation he had heard more than a month ago between Carmean and the Shadow, Grannis, he had

a rather sharp conviction they were after him.

He said, "I think you'd better try to get your Pa on the"—he hesitated—"radio and see if he can come here. We'll try to hold them off until he arrives and then, if possible, you can go with him."

Lela was pale. "What about you?"

Cargill did not answer immediately. The feeling of vagueness that was inside him was only too familiar. It was the same kind of blur that had made it possible for him to swim ashore on the coast of Normandy. With that blurred feeling about his future he had entered all the subsequent battles in which he had been engaged.

He said now, "I'll try to slip away tonight after it gets dark." He was about to elaborate when his gaze strayed past her toward the edge of the clearing a hundred feet away. A Shadow stood there.

His face must have shown that something was wrong for Lela whirled. Her body grew rigid. The Shadow had been motionless as if observing the scene. Now he began to walk toward the ship.

There was a dazed expression on Lela's face. She straightened slowly, settled herself behind the long spitgun and aimed it. Her face seemed bloodless and she sat very still.

Twice she seemed in the act of pressing the activator of that remarkable weapon. Each time she shuddered and closed her eyes. "I can't," she whispered at last. "I *can't!*"

The Shadow was less than fifty feet away. In a frantic will to action Cargill pulled the girl out of the chair, settled into it and grabbed the gun. A sheet of flame reared up a dozen feet in front of the Shadow.

The Shadow paid no attention. He came on. Once more Cargill fired. The flame blazed through the Shadow. A score of feet behind him grass and shrubbery burned with a white intensity. Twice more Cargill fired directly into the Shadow-shape—and each time it was as if there was nothing there, no resistance, no substance. And the Shadow-shape came closer.

Cargill ceased firing. He was trembling. There was a thought in his mind—a new tremendous thought. If the Shadow-shape were insubstantial, if potent, palpable energy meant nothing to it, then what about steel walls.

The next instant he had his answer. There was a blur of movement near the door, a swelling darkness. Lela screamed.

And then the Shadow was in the room.

CHAPTER IX

The Moment for Action

THIS time, there was no sense of transition. One instant he was in the floater with Lela and the Shadow Grannis. The next moment he was sitting in a chair, trying to blink away a blur over his vision. It cleared after several seconds and he looked around him.

He saw that he was in a chair at one end of a tastefully furnished living room. On one wall was a clock that said "May 6, 9:24 P.M." To his left was an open door through which he could see the edge of a bed.

The wall directly across from him was made of transparent glass and beyond it, at the far end of another room, he could see a girl sitting in a chair that seemed to be a replica of his own. Just for a moment, Cargill had the feeling that all this was strange and then he recognized the girl. He jerked erect with amazement.

It was the young woman who had tried to pretend that she was Marie Chanette.

It was the room where he had first arrived in the 24th century.

His mind wrenched with a terrible understanding. *He was back to the evening of his original arrival.*

The astounding thing was that he had no doubt about it. The knowledge grew

out of a score of separate incidents that drew together inside him now to form the whole picture. This *was* about the time and exactly the scene at which and on which he had arrived from the DREAM ROOM from 1946.

It took time to verify that. Trembling, he wrote a note to the girl and held it up against the glass. The note read, *How long have you been here?*

In answer, she wrote, *About three hours.*

Cargill nodded in an intensity of understanding. She could be lying, of course. She was unquestionably on a different footing with these people than himself and one of the problems he had to solve was—where had *she* been during the past few months?

That could wait. Distracted, he realized his limited possibilities for verifying the details. There was no way that he could prove or disprove any of her statements. The feeling he had, that Grannis was not satisfied with events as they had occurred and that the entire scene of his arrival was to be done over again, had come out of his own mind.

He wrote two more notes, repeating the questions he had asked the first time—months ago—and then, in a haze of excitement, he retreated to a chair. Slowly, sitting there, he grew more sober.

Something of the fantastic nature of what had happened penetrated. He wondered almost blankly—what about Lela? What had happened to her? Or rather what *would* happen to her? Staggered, he thought about some of the possible paradoxes.

The confusion that started then rocketed him out of his chair and sent him on a frantic exploration of the apartment. It was all as he remembered it and what was particularly important was that the bed looked as if he had previously slept on it.

He remembered the chair that he had smashed and raced from the bedroom back to the living-room to examine it. He found it crumpled in a corner where he had tossed it. His picture of the limits of the paradox grew sharper. This was the room *after* Ann Reece had rescued him—not very long after, however.

Cargill began to sag. The pressure that was working on him was different from anything he had ever experienced. Different even from the first minutes of his first arrival. There was a shattering implication here.

If these people didn't like what had happened in any time period they could alter it. In one directed time-reversal they could cancel what had displeased them and the next time, with pre-knowledge, could force it to the pattern they desired.

There was a possibility here that after what he had done in trying to organize a Planiac rebellion Grannis wanted the Shadows to carry through with their original purpose. That would be the simplest way of nullifying the past.

His captors, knowing nothing of his months with the floater folk, could now proceed to kill him without ever suspecting that Grannis had plotted against them.

Cargill decided grimly, "I'll fix that. The moment they get in touch with me I'll tell them the whole story."

He was planning his exact words when a voice said from behind him, "Morton Cargill, it is my duty to prepare you for death."

The moment for action—and counteraction—had come.

CARGILL climbed to his feet. Fighting his anxiety and speaking clearly he launched into his account. He had time for half a dozen sentences and then the voice interrupted him, not deliberately, not with any intent to break into what he was saying.

The interruption showed no awareness that he had said anything. Whoever was talking had not heard his words.

The voice said, "Events are supremely convincing. I shall now describe to you the complex problem with which you presented us when Marie Chanette was killed in the Twentieth Century."

Cargill couldn't help it. He had to

cut in. He said loudly, "Just a minute. You've explained this to me before."

"Violence," the voice said, "affects not just one individual but future generations as well."

Cargill shouted, "Listen to me. There's a plot—"

"It's like a stone," said the voice, "that is flung furiously into a limitless sea. The ripples go on forever and wash up many a strange flotsam on shores remote beyond imagination."

Cargill trembled with anger. "You stupid idiots!" he yelled, "Surely you haven't put me in here without any chance of telling you what's happened." But his very anger measured the extent of his own belief that surely they had indeed.

Inexorably the voice continued. And for the first time Cargill realized that it was giving him information different from that of—months ago.

"Listen to the case," it said, "of Marie Chanette."

For better or worse he listened. His muscles tensed and his mind jumped with impatience but he listened. Gradually then, in spite of his own purposes, he grew calmer and began to feel fascinated.

Much indeed had happened as the result of the death of Marie Chanette. She died in a car accident and in pain. The pain ended with her death but that was not the end.

There was no normal end.

Marie Chanette was survived by a daughter who, at the time of her mother's decease, was three years and two months of age, and by a husband from whom she was not yet offi·ially divorced. The fight for the possession of the child had been bitter and on the death of her mother little Julia Marie reverted automatically to the care of her father, an insurance salesman.

At first he kept her in a nursery school and had a neighboring woman tend her after the school bus brought her home. At first he spent occasional evenings with her. But he was a hard worker, and evening calls on prospects were part of his routine.

The enforced habit of not having much to do with her made it easy to forget all about her on evenings when it was just a matter of going out with the gang for a good time.

He told himself that she was really getting a better upbringing than if her mother had been alive and that he was "paying plenty" for her care. When she asked why she didn't have a mummy like the other kids he decided in her own interests (so he informed himself) to tell her his distorted version of the truth.

And he discovered that she already knew it. Some of the other kids had heard garbled stories and had shrieked the words at her. They were locked up tightly inside her heart.

She grew up unstable, blotchy-faced, easily upset, a bad-tempered, wilful child—"just like your mother, blast you!" Chanette shouted at her when he was drunk.

She never got over the tensions of

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her childhood, though she turned out to be a good-looking girl and had a brief exciting spring between the ages of 21 and 25. She married in 1965 a young man named Thompson, who was not good enough for her.

She had too great an inferiority complex to aspire to anything higher. In 1974, she gave him a boy child, a girl in 1976 and died in 1980, ostensibly from a major hysterectomy but actually from an ultimate case of overwrought nerves.

Thompson drifted along for a while at his job but now that the intense driving frightening personality of his wife was no longer pushing him he was quick to retreat from responsibility. He lacked the capacity to appreciate the benefits he had accumulated in fifteen years of service with the Atomotor Corporation.

Just as they were about to promote him to the kind of field work which the firm's "Constitutional" psychologist had recommended for him he traded his atobout for a floater, gave up his job, sold his house—and became a Planiac.

They called them that in those lazy glorious days just before the turn of the twenty-first century. They were floaters, people who had no home but a house in the sky. All day long they floated through the air anywhere from a few thousand feet to a few miles up.

At night they would come down beside a graceful stream and cast for fish. Or they would float down onto the ocean and return to land with a catch which some cannery would be glad to buy.

They followed the crops. They were the new race of fruit pickers, harvesters and casual laborers. They remained a day, a week, but seldom a month. They only wanted a stake, enough money to live until tomorrow.

IN 2002 A.D. it was estimated that nineteen million people in the United States had become floaters or Planiacs. The stay-at-home majority was shocked and economists predicted disaster for the land unless something was done to bring the skyriding population back to earth.

When a hard-pressed Congress in 2004 tried to pass a law restricting skyriding to vacations only it was too late. The voting power of the Planiacs frightened the house majority, and thereafter the floaters—who had themselves received a big scare—were a political force to be reckoned with.

The bitter feeling between the floaters and the grounders, already intense, grew sharper and deadlier with the passing years. Everyone took sides. Some who had been grounders bought floaters and joined the restless throngs in the sky.

Others, vaguely recognizing the danger and moved by some kind of moral feeling, descended from the sky. Among the latter was an oldster named William Thompson, his grown-up son, Pinkey, and his daughter, Christina.

Johnny "Pinkey" Thompson never married and so he was merely an environment, a ne'er-do-well anthropological "climate," an irritant on the slime of time. He existed, therefore he influenced those with whom he came in contact.

Whatever he took into his bloodstream before severing bodily connection with his mother manifested indirectly. Many years were to pass before psychologists proved that the tensions of men too could affect the child. But Pinkey had no child.

When Christina Thompson, his sister, came out of the blue sky her grandmother, Marie Chanette, had been dead sixty-one years. The emotional ripples of her death had therefore already reached into another century.

No one knows definitely what does or does not affect and influence a child. Her mother's tense body had precipitated Christina into life in the eighth month of her pregnancy. The seventh month would have been better. During the eighth month certain growths occur in a child which should not be disturbed.

The process was disturbed in Christina.

She was a quiet intense little girl,

given to sudden, unexpected tears and was quite a nuisance to her father and brother when she was younger. She knew, in a casual fashion, about the way her grandmother had died.

What she did not know was that the new psychology had already established that people could be affected by events in the remote past of the continuous bloodstream which had flowed from mother through daughter since life first channeled the salt sea into a flesh body.

Christina reluctantly attached herself to a job and, when she was twenty-eight, married the son of a former Planiac. The three children that arrived in quick succession were demoralized by the endless plans of their restless poverty-stricken parents to save so they could buy a floater, so that they could forever abandon the hardships of ground life.

Two of the children dreamed with their parents but the second child, a girl, reacted violently against what she came to consider their shiftless attitude. Their very talk made her uneasy and insecure.

Her opinions being discovered she became unpopular until she learned to show false enthusiasm for the venture. She ran away when she was eighteen on the eve of the first trip in the hard-earned floater.

She had several jobs, then at twenty-one she became a clerk in a small air-transport company. Small! It barely paid a living wage to the father and son who owned it, in addition to paying her salary.

When she married Garry Lane, the son, at twenty-two, it looked like a very poor match, even to her desperate eyes. But it was a love match and, surprisingly, the business prospered.

Well, not exactly surprisingly—the son had one of those marvelous personalities. When he made a contact it stuck. Business flew their way and soon they lived in a grand house in the Hollywood Hills.

They had two children, Betty and Jack. And what saddened the parents was that both children were neurotics. They hired specially trained nurses. That helped but not as much as it should have.

AT twenty-four Betty Lane, having been advised that her instability was not rooted in her own childhood, was directed by her personal psychologist to go to the Inter-Time Society for Psychological Adjustment.

She went. An investigation was made and it was decided that the death of Marie Chanette was responsible.

"—and that," said the voice from the air in front of Cargill, "explains why you are here in this therapy room. Tomorrow morning it will be necessary to kill you in order that the effects of Marie Chanette's violent death can be nullified. That is all."

There was silence and it was evident that the speaker had withdrawn.

For an hour Cargill paced the room like a caged animal, his temper steadily gathering strength. But finally his thoughts narrowed back to reality.

He had become dangerous to Grannis and so now he was to be killed. Incredibly the Shadows, despite their vaunted superiority, were going to be destroyed by the schemes of one of their number.

It served them right, Cargill told himself in fury. Imagine setting up a situation whereby their victims couldn't even talk to them—the silly, stupid fools!

In abrupt rebellion against his fate, he explored the apartment for some means of escape, first the living room, and then—

As he entered the bedrom, Ann Reece was just getting up from the floor. She saw him, and put a finger to her lips.

"Ssssshh!" she said.

Cargill blinked at her with eyes that watered with relief. He could have rushed over and hugged her. He had to restrain himself from racing over to the elongated tube-like instrument which had brought her, grabbing at it and shouting, "Let's get out of here!" He restrained himself because it was up to her to show if *she* remembered a previous rescue.

She said, "This time let's not waste a moment. It's bad enough having to come twice."

This time—twice! That was all he wanted to know. Silently, sure of himself again, Cargill grabbed at the tube. He blinked—and it must have happened as quickly as that.

CHAPTER X

The Tweener World

HE was standing on a dusty road and it was already dark. A few feet from him Ann Reece was bent over, making adjustments to the long tube-like transport instrument. She had evidently recovered more quickly than he.

She looked up and said satirically, "Well, here we are, starting all over again, Mr. Cargill."

Briefly her sarcastic tone blurred the implication of what she had said. And then he thought shakily that "somewhere around, just about that time of day and on that very day, he had run off into the brush. Right then, about a mile from here, Lela and her father were settling down beside a lake, and in a few moments she would capture Morton Cargill number one.

He had an impulse to escape again and watch that other Morton Cargill's capture. He shook his head, rejecting the desire. A man threatened as he was had no time for side excursions.

Ann Reece lifted the transporter and said to somebody behind Cargill, "All right, Lauer, you take this back to Grannis."

A young man stepped past Cargill. In the darkness it was almost impossible to make him out. He said sourly, "I don't see why we want to give it back to him. We haven't got anything like this."

Ann Reece shoved the transporter into his hands, grabbed him by the arm and led him along the road out of hearing. Cargill could make them out vaguely. They were arguing furiously. Presently Lauer must have yielded for he shouldered the instrument and trudged off. Ann came back to Cargill.

"We wait here," she said, "and this time you'd better not try to run off." She added to somebody behind him, "If he makes a break spit him."

Cargill had heard the men behind him but he hadn't looked at them and he didn't intend to. The quarrel between Lauer and Ann interested him. It implied that some Tweeners at least were dissatisfied with Grannis. He wondered idly if he might not be able to start another revolution.

Aloud, deliberately, he said, "Oh, mud."

The young woman showed no sign that she had heard. The minutes trickled by. In the nearby brush a nightbird trilled, breaking the intense silence. Far away a coyote howled mournfully. Cargill felt a sudden press of air against him as if a big bird had passed over his head on silent wings.

Beside him Ann Reece's flashlight blinked on. She pointed it into the sky, waved it violently, then turned to Cargill.

"In a few minutes," she said, "a volor will come down here. Don't say a word, just get in and go to the rear away from the pilots."

She added in a low tone, "The air transport men are anxious to get hold of you. They want to question you about the air fighting in World War Two. But they can't have you till you've been trained."

Cargill, who had been an Infantry officer, maintained a discreet silence.

"Sssshh," said Ann Reece unnecessarily, "here they come."

The machine that settled down toward them over the trees was not a floater. It had swept-back wings and a long metal body. It must have been made of super-strong alloys for it crushed down among the trees that lined the narrow roadside and snapped one bole with a casualness that was all the more impressive because the tree came down with a roar.

There was a rush of wind and then the plane slowed for the landing and poked a bright beam of light at them. A side door opened. Cargill ran forward, aware of the young woman following close behind.

The entrance was higher than it had looked from a distance. He had to scramble to get inside. He slipped past a man in uniform, who was coming forward, fumbled his way along a dimly-lighted aisle and finally sank into the seat farthest to the rear.

He heard Ann Reece say, "Help me up!"

The young man said something Cargill couldn't hear but it had ancient connotations.

Ann Reece snapped, "Let go of my hand. I can hold it myself, thank you."

The officer laughed, then said, "Was that the great man?"

CARGILL heard no more. The machine moving, slowly at first, then with a violence that left no doubt of how different it was from the slow-motion floaters which—as Cargill knew only too well—were practically helpless at night.

It climbed steeply, like a plane rather than an airship. And its speed after less than a minute was something to murmur about. He couldn't remember ever having been in a machine that moved so fast.

It gave him pause. It made his purpose seem less than possible. People who could build such planes had an advanced mechanical culture, and they would not be easily controlled by a man from the twentieth century. His partial success with the floater folk must have gone to his head. He was setting himself against people who actually planned an attack against the mysterious Shadows.

The city came suddenly out of the distance. Great bulbs of light floated in the sky. They glared down on the buildings below, lighting up the scene vividly. Ann Reece settled into the adjoining seat. Cargill scarcely noticed.

It was a city of skyscrapers. They sparkled at him from the distance with effervescent, changing lights. They seemed to be made of glass, their translucent opalescence glowing softly. The first feeling of alienness passed. Cargill gazed at the city, excitement quickening his pulse.

Beside him Ann Reece said quietly, "You're the first outsider in twenty years to see the capital."

Cargill looked at her questioningly. "You mean no strangers are allowed in Tweener territory?"

Ann Reece shook her head. "This is our capital city," she said. "It contains all the secrets of our people. We cannot afford to take chances. For twenty years all new Tweeners, all Tweeners who have failed in the Shadow tests, have been sent to other cities. No Shadow, not even Grannis, has been permitted to enter in that time."

"How can you stop the Shadows?" Cargill asked. He was remembering the way Grannis had walked unharmed through the fire of the spit gun that he had directed from Lela's and his floater.

"They're not as invulnerable as they would like us to believe," said Ann Reece, a grim note in her voice. "If you concentrate enough fire on them they run as fast as any ordinary mortal. We've discovered that." In the darkness inside the volor, she made a gesture he didn't see.

"Anyway we don't permit them to enter our territory. We are very strict about that. No one can enter the areas under our control without permission, and everyone who does enter has to submit to a thorough investigation."

"How much of this continent do you control?" Cargill asked.

"About one quarter."

Cargill nodded. He remembered how many times Lela had turned the floater aside, and said, "That's Tweener territory. We don't go there." He nodded again, half to himself. The floater folk must have discovered through experience that Tweener territory was dangerous.

"And where's Shadow City?" he asked.

"Oh, that's in the Rockies. The city

is an impregnable fortress, hewn out of the rocks of almost inaccessible mountain and protected by an energy screen. It's approachable only by air."

They were over the Tweener capital now.

Cargill had a glimpse of glittering shopping centers adding their refulgence to the dazzling scene. Gradually the streets below became dimmer, more residential in nature.

The volor began to slant down. He saw that they were over a broad expanse of lawn. It was evidently an estate for he could see in the distance what looked like stone fences.

A large house stood well back among the trees.

Ann Reece said, "This is my home."

Cargill looked at her in surprise. Then he looked again at the house and whistled softly under his breath. He had taken it for granted that Ann Reece was merely a minor agent, an unimportant cog in this affair.

HE looked again at the house. It was spacious and beautiful. It was of stone and its casselated walls rose in ever higher peaks and spires until, like some dimly seen dream-castle, they faded from sight in the high shadows.

The windows were tall and pointed at the tops. The door was huge and matched the windows in design. The steps leading up to it were broad and white. It was an estate, all right, he thought with a quick intake of breath. Such a house, he estimated, would have cost three or four hundred thousand dollars in Los Angeles, 1946.

He climbed the steps wonderingly. It was evident that in this affair he would be moving in high Tweener circles indeed.

Ann Reece rang the bell. There was a pause and then the door was opened by an elderly man.

The man said, "Welcome home, Miss Reece."

"Thank you, Granger," said Ann. She motioned Cargill to go past her and they walked silently along a brightly-lighted corridor and came presently to a room.

CHAPTER XI

Brain-Pattern

THE room was large and well furnished, and Cargill examined it alertly. Directly across from him were a series of French doors that led to a terrace. Without hesitation he strode towards the doors and tried one of them. It opened, which surprised him.

He had intended only to glance out. It was to be one look into the darkness to gain a quick picture of his surroundings.

What he saw snatched his attention. The city—seen for the first time from the ground. When Ann Reece and he had arrived at the house the volor had landed them almost at the door. There had been little chance to observe the great globes of light that floated above the city.

Seen from the air, from the tremendously swift volor, the globes had appeared stationary. Now he saw that they were moving steadily like the stars in their courses. Like miniature suns they shed their light on the metropolis below and followed each other round in a circular movement.

Cargill had to force his eyes away from them. He turned and went back into the room—and realized how tired he was. The long, tense night with Lela on the floater, the prolonged anxiety while he was in the Shadow prison again and the events of the past two hours, had taken toll of his strength. Wearily he sank down into a comfortable chair. Ann said, "I'll have some food prepared for you."

She was turning away when Cargill remembered something. "I've been intending to ask you," he said. "What happened to you after I escaped that first time?"

"I reported your escape to Grannis naturally. About half an hour later there was a time adjustment and I had to do the job again."

"Half—an—hour—later?" said Cargill.

He stared at her, more startled than he cared to admit. His picture of the process of time manipulation had been vague. Suddenly he saw it as something that was done to one individual.

She hadn't lived those months. For her the adjustment had taken place this very first night. Those who controlled the time stream really had potent power over its flow.

It didn't seem to occur to Ann Reece to ask what had happened to him. She crossed over to a door and disappeared.

CARGILL was served a thick steak, medium rare, a baked potato and a baked apple for desert. He ate with a concentration and purpose that reminded him of his first meal aboard the Bouvy floater. Thought of Lela tensed him. And so, when he suddenly looked up and saw that Ann was sitting back, watching him with amusement, it irritated him.

She had changed her dress while the meal was being prepared. The short skirt was gone and she wore a long blue gown that matched the color of her eyes. It also made her look much younger.

She had a pert face with a faintly calculating expression on it. Her lips were firm and well-shaped. She carried herself with an air of great assurance.

"What's all this about?" Cargill said. "What are you going to train me for?"

Her expression changed. A set look came into her eyes and her lips tightened. But her voice retained some of the humor of her earlier amusement.

She said, "You're the key figure. Without you there's no war."

"I'm sure I'm thrilled," said Cargill acridly. "Does that make me a general?"

"Well, not exactly." She broke off. She snapped, "We're sick of the horrible world the Shadows have created for us." Her voice lost all its lightness. It grew hard with anger.

"Imagine," she flared, "changing the past so that people will gradually become more civilized, get over their neuroses and all that nonsense."

Her lips clenched into thin lines. Then she said slowly, "There's only one way to change the world. We've got to get rid of the Shadows, force the Planiacs out of the sky and down to a life of usefulness. Once that happens, it won't be long before this planet is humming again with industry and all that makes life worth living."

Cargill's hunger was gone. He felt basically too hostile to her to be impressed by her vision. He demanded, "But where do I fit into this? What is the training that I'm to be given?"

Ann Reece relaxed. The amused look came back to her face. She said with heavy irony, "One times one times one times one times zero equals a million. That's the mathematics involved in your training. Anything else you want to know?"

"Blast you!" said Cargill. He was on his feet, leaning over the table toward her. "If you people expect any cooperation from me you'd better start telling me the facts. Whose idea was it to use me in whatever you're going to use me for in this Shadow City attack?"

"Grannis."

That held him briefly. "How come," said Cargill finally, "that you're all playing the game of a Shadow traitor?"

Ann Reece was cool. "We're not playing his game. He's playing ours. He agrees with us. He thinks we have the answer to the problems of this age."

"You fools!" Cargill was scathing. "Why, you're just a bunch of babes in the wood. You—"

He stopped himself in alarm. Careful, he thought. This was no time to reveal his special knowledge of Grannis and his plans. Slowly he settled back into his chair. He stared at her unsmilingly. She said, "As soon as you've finished eating I'll show you to your bedroom. You sound tired." There was no doubt of the sarcasm in her voice.

AFTER she had left him Cargill explored his bedroom. It was small, but skilfully arranged. The walls were done in shades of green, contrasting with a vividly white bed and white

furniture—very effective.

He was surprised when he looked out of the window, to see that the room was on the second floor. Since he had climbed no stairs he guessed that the house was built on the side of a hill.

He mentally measured the distance to the ground below, then frowned with irritation. It was at least twenty feet, a considerable drop even for a strong active man. Not that it mattered. He doubted that he'd get far if he tried to escape through the window. His method of handling this situation must be on a much higher level of action.

He turned back into the room and started to undress. In spite of his nap in the living room he was tired and he fell asleep almost immediately.

A voice began to talk to him, urging him to action, something about Shadow City and the necessity of breaking down the Shadow pyramid.

"Throw the switch," the voice commanded. "And the signal for you to act is—is . . ."

It faded away. The sound and its echoes retreated into an abyss of time and space. If the signal was mentioned, it was too far away for him to hear—then.

Hours later, he awoke with a start and simultaneously realized two things. It was broad daylight and a voice was saying from the air just above his head, "The signal for you to act will be the phrase, 'Visit us some time!' "

He told Ann Reece about it at breakfast, adding irritably, "You don't think that kind of hypnosis is going to work on me."

She was smugly triumphant. "It's not exactly hypnosis," she said. "The electronic tube I used works on the principle I mentioned last night, where one times one etcetera equals a million or a billion, or whatever it's set for—in this case a million. When I turned that tube on last night it established a pattern in your brain that only another tube set differently could eradicate "

She shrugged. "So you're trained. You can no longer communicate in any way to anybody the knowledge you have of the plan. And when you hear that cue your legs will carry you to the pyramid power house. Your hands will throw the switch. And you'll do all this exactly at twelve o'clock noon, Shadow City time, after you've been given the signal."

"Just a minute," said Cargill. He had been listening with a strained sense of unreality. Now, abruptly, he tried to snatch a shred of victory from the implacable fact.

"What day," he asked hoarsely, "will this happen?"

She was calm. "You'll find that out," she said, "when it happens." She broke off. "Better finish your breakfast. There'll be an air force floater here to pick you up in half an hour."

Things were moving fast.

CHAPTER XII

Conspiracy

THERE must be something he could say or do to make sure that things happened right for himself, Cargill thought as he stood among the volor pilots later that morning. Because—it was obvious—the attack couldn't take place for at least two months.

That much he knew. He had lived slightly over two months with Lela Bouvy and had listened to a Shadow City radio-TV station right up to the last.

Just for a moment, with Ann Reece, he had forgotten that. He'd never forget it again. He was living a time-paradox existence and for all he knew the paradox was even more intricate than he could hope to guess or imagine.

But he'd have to make sure that there *was* delay. He'd have to force this situation to his will.

Warily he looked around him. The day was perfect. It was good to be alive and here on this verdantly green hillside. The fleecy white of the small cumulus clouds that floated lazily in the higher vault of the heavens only served to emphasize its blueness. An occasional

breeze rustled through the leaves of the trees and puffed against his cheeks, bringing the smell of growing things.

In the distance he could see the slow yellow water of a broad river. The flats that spread between him and that wide expanse of water were covered with clumps of swamp willow and a kind of coarse stiff grass whose tall serrated blades looked sharp and forbidding even at this distance.

Cargill wondered if this were the Mississippi River. The possibility excited him. He pictured himself standing here in the 24th century, looking down at the great river, its muddy, sluggish water so little changed after all these centuries.

From somewhere in the rear of the group of pilots a man said curtly, "I still don't approve of this man Cargill being here as an adviser. It's a Shadow trick of some kind."

Cargill turned stiffly and saw that the speaker was an intense-looking young man with dark brown eyes and a hawk-like nose. The officer, a full-fledged pilot, reminded him of Lauer. There was the same hard questioning tone, the same rebelliousness against the decisions of those higher in authority.

An older officer, who had been introduced to Cargill as Flight Commander Greer, said in a tone of mild reproof, "Withrow, the presence of Captain Cargill makes all our plans possible. Besides, he's here. We're committed.

"My own opinion is that if we learn even a little from him about air tactics and strategy of World War Two we'll be amply repaid in lives saved."

"And I," said Cargill, "will try to assure that I also survive the attack." It was a point he intended to keep driving home—that he had a stake now in their success.

There was no time for Withrow to comment. Dark specks appeared among the fleecy clouds. Almost instantly, the sky was full of volors. They came in over the river, low and in close formation. Even as Cargill watched the rushing machines he was aware of the group of officers around him watching him. They expected a reaction. The question was—what ought his answer to be?

He strained to recall the thousands of planes that he had seen in action, the scores of times he had stood on the battered soil of Europe and watched allied and enemy planes maneuver for the kill.

The volors whistled by a few hundred feet above the ground. He judged their speed to be as great as that of a jet plane. Cargill, who had seen only two or three jets—and those German—was impressed.

WITH a hiss of tortured air the volors plunged past. Cargill turned to follow their flight but they were already gone into the glare of the sun in the eastern sky—and the time had undoubtedly come for him to say something.

He began to ask questions. "Just what is the nature of the assault you're planning. Will you attack in flight formation or is it going to be individual ships diving down?"

Withrow said coldly, "Their protective pyramid of energy goes down and we dive in."

"We plan to attack without regard for danger," said Commander Greer.

Cargill was silent. He knew that kind of attitude, and it was basically sound —except for one thing. As he examined the possibilities he nodded half to himself. The question was—could he convince them? Could he make them see? He had better think over carefully what he ought to say, and for that he needed delay.

He said, "I'd like to see this from the other side before I tell you my ideas." He pointed. "From up there. Can we go up?"

He sat in the co-pilot's chair in the control room, and watched the volor climb. The machine rocketed upward like a shooting star. Cargill was squeezed back into his seat. The blood seemed to drain from his body. And then they were leveling off and the earth flowed by below.

Cargill watched that unfolding scene for nearly a minute, finally turned to

the men who were crowded into a series of small seats in the control room.

He said to Commander Greer, "How many weapons do you have aboard?"

The officer leaned forward and indicated a trigger device in front of the pilot. "From here," he said, "you can see everything below us. You just have to make these hair lines balance on the target, then press the trigger. The billion-tube goes into action."

Cargill nodded, unhappily. One times one times one times one times zero equalled a billion with this tube, the power of which could be varied at will. He had learned some trick mathematics at college, where one times one equalled one and a half plus one plus one equalled three. But this was a million, billion, quadrillion times different. Here was the power source of this era. A variable tube. From what he had seen and heard he gathered that it was some kind of electronic tube.

He stopped thinking about that. They had turned and were rushing back toward the city. They crossed the river like a shot from a gun. The city blurred by beneath them, then they were catapulting above a tremendous forest. A second city blinked by below, came into sight again as the volor and its companions made a U-turn in perfect formation, was lost to sight in the distant haze.

The speed of the volors was colossal. Cargill had a singing feeling of wonder at their rate of travel. He asked, "How fast?"

The pilot answered, "At this moment one and a half times the speed of sound."

Before he could more than grasp the figure the capitol showed ahead and they were diving. The ground rushed up to meet them. He saw the firing fields ahead. The pilot gripped the firing device and pressed the trigger gently.

Flame rolled up from below, a colossal sheet of it. Cargill strained to look back through the transparent floor. He had a brief glimpse of a raging inferno, then that was gone behind them.

From the back of the control room the satirical voice of Withrow said, "Well, Captain Cargill, what advice can you offer us?"

The man sounded smugly arrogant. His tone indicated that he at least took it for granted that the Tweener air force was perfect as it was. Clearly he would attach no value to any minor suggestions made by a man from the remote dark ages of the twentieth century. Cargill drew a deep breath and accepted the challenge.

He said, "The fighting standards of this air force are too low. Any appreciable resistance would, in my opinion, shatter the attack. And unquestionably there will be resistance.

"Certain comments I have heard seem to indicate the belief that the Shadows will be overwhelmed in the first minutes of the attack. Such a notion strikes me as utterly fantastic."

HE did not look directly at any individually, as he went on, coolly. He described how entire divisions had been withdrawn from battle because the men had been trained by officers who did not know how to put fighting spirit into their soldiers.

"Such divisions," he explained, "can be massacred by resistance forces that would normally not even be able to slow down a fighting division."

He continued in an inexorable tone. "The shock to the nervous system of a man under fire for the first time has to be experienced to be understood. On the ground the method used was to land him on an enemy beach or otherwise commit him to battle—and depend on his training to carry him through.

"Those who survive a series of such engagements become seasoned veterans, all this providing they have been handled well by their officers. In the air force bombers made their bomb runs and then headed for home. In this way the crews were under heavy fire for only a few minutes at a time and so those that survived became enormously cunning and skilful."

He dared to pause at that moment and take a lightning glance around the

faces of the officers. It was a long time since he had seen so many white faces. He pressed on quickly.

"As for specific suggestions for the volors, here's my picture. You've got to have weapons in the rear, so that you can fire at the target coming and going. In addition, I think you should have fighter protection for the volors that actually attack the target. And any attack should be in broken formation from all sides, unevenly and without pattern. Practise that."

He broke off. "So far as the pilots are concerned let me give them lectures during the next few weeks and accustom them to the idea that they may have to endure fire for hours. And now"—he shrugged—"I'll have to think over any further points. Let's go down."

The landing was smooth as glass. They drew up before a huge, streamlined building. Absently, as he talked to Greer, Cargill watched Withrow walk over to a group of officers under an alcove.

When he looked again a minute later the group seemed to be in earnest conversation. Presently one of the men sauntered over and Cargill recognized the officer who had ferried him from Ann Reece's home to the airfield that morning—a man named Nallen.

The man said casually, "Whenever Captain Cargill is ready, I'll take him home."

Commander Greer held out his hand. "We'll be seeing you again, Captain. Your recommendations shocked me but I can already see what you mean."

Cargill accepted the proffered handshake, half-minded to object to Nallen. He stopped himself deliberately. This was another group. He must find out their purpose.

A FEW minutes later he was in a floater, heading out over the city. He had not long to wait. Withrow stepped out of the control room, followed by two other officers. He sank into the seat across the aisle from Cargill. There was a faint ironic smile on his face.

"Captain," he said, "I have to make an apology to you. I put on an arrogant front in order to conceal my true intentions. I represent a group which is opposed to the Shadow war. It is our opinion that you cannot be violently in favor of the attack.

"Accordingly we want to ask your advice, and to offer you some in turn. You must try to win Miss Reece to our point of view. Grannis tells us that the best method would be for you to try to make love to her—"

"*Grannis!*" Cargill echoed.

He sat blankly, letting the shock waves subside. But, he thought finally, with an almost owlish seriousness, that didn't make sense. Grannis was the Shadow behind these murderous schemes. Why should he advise—

Swiftly, the weight of doubt lifted from him. It was possible there was no hope here. The deadly thing in all this was that if Grannis didn't like any particular development he could use his control of time to nullify it.

But a man in Cargill's position could not seriously consider such a limitation. He must fight for his life with every tool at his disposal. Here, in Withrow and his group, was possibly such a tool.

Cargill looked up alertly. "Just what kind of organization have you got?"

Later, he said, "We'll have to change it. Too many people know each other. Set up the following system—" He described the infiltration tactics necessary for a successful revolution.

Just before they landed he explained seriously, "In our time we watched the process of forcible transfer of governmental control a score of times. You make a list of all the people who are likely to be troublesome or who are in positions of power.

"At a set moment you put them under arrest, take control of the centers of communication and start issuing orders. Get the important military leaders on your side. If there's doubt of the outcome a leader with a large force at his disposal can sway the balance."

As they were separating, he said with a laugh, "Yes, I'll woo Miss Reece. I

don't think there'll be any result but at least it will distract her attention from other things."

But it was a week before he even saw her again. And then, annoyingly, she chose an evening to be home when he and Withrow had a rendezvous in the terrace garden.

CHAPTER XIII

The Wooing of Ann

NIGHT. And time for Withrow. The trouble was, it seemed to the irritated Cargill, Ann Reece showed no inclination to leave the living-room. He watched her from his chair as she paced the floor. She stopped suddenly and stared at him with narrowed eyes.

"In spite of all my efforts these last few days," she said, "you've done it." Her tone was accusing.

"You've put off the attack at least a month, possibly longer," she said. "I tried to convince them it was a trick on your part but Commander Greer swore that your criticisms showed a grave weakness in our attack tactics. The leaders have accepted that."

She came close to him and there was not even a hint of the satirical lightness of manner which he had come to expect of her.

"Captain Cargill," she said grimly, you're playing this game altogether too well to suit our group. We've decided to accept the delay this time but—" She stopped. Her rather full lips were drawn into a menacing smile.

Cargill studied her, fascinated. In spite of his will to get her out of the way, the very depth of her determination caught his interest.

He said slowly, "What puzzles me is that a young woman as good looking as you should be a conspirator in man's game of war."

The words were seriously spoken. Not until he had uttered them did he realize they could be an opening wedge for the lovemaking Grannis had suggested. They even had a secondary possibility. He stood up.

"Where I come from," he said, "we were just coming out of a period when a girl had a pretty clear idea that a man in uniform who whistled at her didn't want to talk about the ideals we were fighting for."

The remark must have been unexpected, its import far from her thoughts. She gave him a startled look and then a frown creased her forehead.

She said curtly, "Stay away from me."

Cargill walked slowly toward her. It seemed to him Grannis had definitely misread this cold young woman but more sharply now he saw in her visible perturbation the solution to that secondary problem of his.

"You must," he said, "have grown up under very curious circumstances. It's unusual to see a woman of your courage so afraid of herself. Did the death of your parents put you on the defensive with men?"

She stopped backing away. Her voice showed that his words had struck deep. She said too sharply, "Our group has a single purpose, to destroy the Shadows. When that is accomplished there will be time enough to think of marrying and having children."

CARGILL paused five feet from her. "I can tell you right now," he said, "you've got the wrong slant about what goes on during a war. The birth rate goes up, not down. Every hospital is filled with women carrying out some man's desperate determination to survive the war if only by proxy."

"We shall marry the survivors," said Ann Reece calmly. "It would be silly for a girl, particularly one in poor circumstances, to burden herself with a dead man's child."

Cargill said drily, "When I lecture to the volor pilots I'll be happy to tell them the girls feel a civilian is the best bet for a husband."

"I didn't say that. I said—"

Cargil cut her off. He was not going to get anywhere with this girl and

therefore the sooner he put her to flight the better.

"And what," he asked, "about the man to whom you've so casually assigned the job of disengaging the pyramid switch in the heart of Shadow City? Do you mean to tell me he's not even going to get a kiss from a pretty girl?"

He stepped forward and tried to take her in his arms. She evaded him and retreated to the door. Laughing, careful not to move so fast that he would actually catch her, Cargill followed.

For one moment Ann Reece hesitated and then, her face scarlet with anger, she fled precipitantly along the corridor and up the broad stairs. He heard the door of her bedroom suite slam shut.

His amusement faded quickly. Cool and intent, Cargill hurried across to the French windows and out into the darkness. A minute later he was talking to Withrow, learning what he had half-expected—that it would require at least a month to set up their underground organization on the cell basis. The first week had shown the general speed of development that could be expected.

Cargill's final comment was, "The important thing is that if anything goes wrong individuals may suffer but the organization itself will remain intact."

They separated on that note.

Later, on his way to his bedroom, he paused on impulse, and knocked on Ann Reece's door. "May I come in?" he called.

There was silence and then an outraged answer. "Don't you dare even try the door."

Cargill twisted the knob noisily. The door was locked. He went on, smiling to himself and quite without shame or guilt. He believed firmly with ninety per-cent of all the soldiers he had ever met that during war time every woman was a possible conquest—and how else could you find out her attitude unless you pursued her?

Having started to pursue Ann Reece he intended to continue. The trouble was that he caught only fleeting glimpses of her. Every night he tried her door but only occasionally could he be sure that she was actually inside. After the first evening's outburst she gave no further hint of her presence.

A month went by. And still the secret organization was not of satisfactory size. The trouble, according to Withrow, was that men known to be opposed to the war adjusted slowly to the concept that a government could be seized from within. It was apparently a brand new idea in this remote age.

FOR six weeks the air force kept Cargill busy. He was flown to distant stations to give his lectures, and he was able to form his first estimate of the size of the Tweenerland—the Tweeners called it America, which was something of a presumption considering their small numbers. But still it pointed the direction of their thoughts.

The new civilization was bounded on the west by the foothills of the Rockies, on the north by what Cargill guessed to be about the southern border of Montana, in the east by a line curving southwest from the lower tip of Lake Michigan, and in the south by northern Texas.

It was a tremendous area for three million people to control but there was no doubt of the control. Cargill could imagine that eventually they would extend their dominion over the entire continent.

He learned that far-sighted Tweeners were already filing claims to vast acreage. He remembered the landless millions of the twentieth century, and it struck him that already the errors of the past were being repeated.

"If I get out of this business alive," he told himself, "I'll try to put a stop to that."

Wherever he looked he saw things that his personal, casual observation of end-results in his own age made it possible for him to evaluate. A score of times he mentally filed away the notation, "I'll have to do something about that—later."

With each day that passed he convinced himself more completely that with his automatic knowledge he *could*

be of enormous value to the people of this age. It stiffened his will power.

He walked straighter, and with a firmer stride. He felt an alertness within himself, a will to action that yet had behind it an enormous instinctive caution. He used words as if they were tools and he was always aware of the possible danger that might come the very next instant.

And so, one evening, he entered Ann Reece's house, walked along the carpeted hallway toward the living-room —and heard a man's emotional voice say, "I intend to kill you both the moment he comes."

Cargill stopped as Ann said in a shaky voice. "You're mad. You'll hang for this."

"*Shut up!*" The tone was not normal. "I know you. You started all this. You're the one that's associated with the Shadow Grannis. I heard all about how he came to you a year ago and you've been his echo ever since."

"I did not start it." Her answer was in a firmer tone. "The volors were already built, the plan made, when Grannis got in touch with me. I reported it to the government and I've been the contact with him ever since."

"That's what I said." The man sounded tremendously satisfied. "You're the contact. With you and this new fellow dead, that'll stop the whole rotten business."

Cargill heard no more. He was racing back toward the front door. He guessed that the assassin had come in through the garden and would be facing into the living room, watching the other entrances.

Out of the door Cargill slipped, around the house, through the gate and—stealthily now, though still swiftly—across the terrace. One of the French windows was open. He moved up beside it, partly sheltered by the wooden frames. And there he paused to size up the situation inside.

The intruder was saying in a high pitched tone, "My folks were Planiacs. They took the Shadow training, and failed. But they came here and I was born into a good home. I had civilized upbringing, a decent education. I married a wonderful girl and I've got two fine kids. The Shadows made that possible."

His voice lifted even higher. "You and those murderous scoundrels who planned the attack hate the Shadows because you all failed. Now you're trying to force the rest of us to your rotten notions. You want to destroy what you aren't smart enough to win."

Cargill saw the man, a powerful-looking individual. His back was to the terrace, and a spitter was barely visible in his fingers. It pointed in the general direction of the girl.

ANN REECE said scathingly, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, a big man like you acting like a cowardly child. Have you thought of what's going to happen to your wife and children if you do anything foolish now?"

Her voice was calm and forceful. She sounded as if she had got all her courage back. She said, "I'm going to give you one chance. Leave now and I won't report this. Quick, make up your mind."

"I'll show you what mind I'm going to make up," the man said violently. He waved the spitter menacingly. "In just about one second—"

He must have heard a sound or noticed a change of expression on Ann Reece's face. He started to turn.

In that unbalanced position Cargill's tackle caught him. The big man went down heavily but firmly. Swiftly, brutally, Cargill plunged on top of him. He was aware of Ann Reece snatching the spitter.

"Get away from him," she yelled at Cargill, "and I'll spit him."

The stranger was doing some yelling of his own. "Help!" he called. "Manot, Gregory."

There was a sound. "All right," said a cold voice from the door. "Ann, put down that gun. Cargill, get up."

Cargill hesitated and then, tense with the new danger, climbed to his feet. He was puzzled. The situation seemed wrong somehow. He turned slowly and

saw the two men in the uniforms of volor pilots. The man returned his gaze steadily.

"Just testing, Captain, just testing," he said. "We've had reports about some kind of underground scheme and so we decided to try to get a reaction."

As the man talked Cargill's mind darted over the events and found nothing out of the way. Ann had acted in character—why not? It was *her* character—and he himself had done only what could have been expected.

He said slowly, "I hope you learned what you wanted."

The pilot said with apparent frankness. "Exactly what we wanted." He bowed to Ann Reece, who was unusually pale. "I want to congratulate you, Miss Reece, on your courage. And don't blame us. Grannis suggested this test."

To the big man, who was just getting up from the floor, he said curtly, "You put on a good act. But now come along."

When they had gone Cargill walked over to the young woman and said, "That was very unkind of them. Here, you'd better sit down. They don't seem to realize what a shock a thing like this can be to the system."

He was thinking, "Grannis again—what could the Shadow be up to?"

Ann Reece allowed herself to be led to a chair. She looked up at him, her face still very white. She said in a low voice, "Thank you for saving my life, Captain."

"I didn't actually save it," said Cargill. "After all it was a fake menace."

She said stiffly, "You didn't know that when you made the attack. I don't know how I can ever repay you."

"Forget it. I thought I was saving my own as well."

She seemed not to hear. "They were testing me," she said. "*Me!*" She seemed overwhelmed.

Cargill started to say something but stopped himself. For the first time he realized that this girl was undergoing a profound emotional experience. He watched her narrowly for a few moments, then reached down and took her hand.

"I think you'd better go to your room and lie down," he said.

She let him lead her. At the door of her bedroom, she stopped. A touch of color came into her cheeks. She didn't look at him.

"Captain," she said, "tonight I realized what you meant about war being different from any picture that I had of it. And I'm very sorry for my share in bringing you into this desperate danger. Can you ever forgive me?"

Cargill thought of the imminent rebellion and said coolly, "I'm in. I've accepted the idea. I'll fight with everything I've got to make sure that I survive." He added, "You'd better lie down."

He opened the door for her. She stepped through and there was more color in her face as she gave him a quick glance.

She said breathlessly, "Captain, you said something once about a reward for a soldier. . . . Tonight, when you try the knob of this door, you'll find that it—turns."

She slipped all the way in. The door closed gently. The faint perfume of her presence lingered.

From that moment Ann Reece was his girl.

CHAPTER XIV

Shadow City

SHE didn't realize that at first. She had no idea how much emotion went along with a physical commitment. If she had been experienced it might have been different. She might have been able to divide herself figuratively into two individuals, on the one hand the patriot, on the other the mistress of the prisoner.

The patriot, in spite of the rude shock of the test, remained fairly intact for five days. At that point she had her first breakdown. Thereafter she cried easily in Cargill's presence. On the eighth day

she came out openly with the suggestion that they find some method of escape.

Her plans were vague, curiously impractical for someone who had been so hard-headed. She had a fine contempt for Cargill's objections. Half a dozen times within the space of a few days she lost her temper with him.

It put a pressure on him in addition to his own anxiety. On the twelfth day he visited the airport and drew Withrow aside angrily.

"I have a feeling," he said, "that your group is stalling. There's a weakness here somewhere, an unwillingness to burn your bridges."

Withrow looked unhappy. "There's something to that," he admitted. "All I hear is excuses."

Cargill could understand that. Only too well he pictured these leaders who had never before seen action. It reminded him of the eve of D-Day. As the stormy dawn broke he had thought and hoped that surely the invasion would be called off. And, curiously, he had thought simultaneously," Thank heaven, the issue is being forced at last."

This issue also had to be forced. And there was only one man who had the motivation, the will and the experience to force it.

He said in measured tone, "Withrow, the attack must be made not later than tomorrow morning. If it isn't made I will inform Commander Greer who the ringleaders are."

Withrow turned pale. "You wouldn't dare."

Cargill said quietly, "Perhaps you'd better let the others think that I would dare."

He returned the pilot's gaze steadily. At last Withrow sighed. He held out his hand.

"You've named the day," he said. "Thank you."

They shook hands silently and separated.

Cargill had his first premonition of disaster as he entered the house shortly after dark. Ann, her face gray, met him at the door.

"They've posted guards around the house," she whispered. "They're sending you to Shadow City tonight."

Cargill stood stock still, dimly aware of her fluttering hands stroking his arm.

"Oh, darling," she whispered, "I'm sorry."

He patted her hand absently. He was thinking, "Is this timed? Do they know or suspect?"

Aloud he said, "Why did they select tonight?"

"Grannis—" she began.

The shock of the name pierced him like a fire. He cut her off in astounded fury, gripped her shoulders cruelly. "But I thought *you* were his contact?"

"I used to be," she whispered. "I don't know what's happened. Please, you're hurting me."

He let her go with a mumbled apology. The sense of imminent catastrophe was greater. The incredible fantastic mysterious Grannis had taken one more step in his inexplicable scheme. But this time he had moved in a direct and deadly fashion.

Whatever else Grannis had in mind it was clear that he intended Captain Morton Cargill to experience the terrible risk of going to Shadow City.

With an effort Cargill caught hold of himself. He said, "Better go and see about dinner. I'll investigate the situation."

He headed for the terrace, crossed the garden in the dark, climbed over the fence—and was stopped by a guard.

"Get back!" The command was curtly spoken. A spitter glinted in the man's hand.

Cargill obeyed readily and headed immediately for the gate that led to the front of the house. It was unlocked. But as he stepped through a soldier came from behind a tree, and angrily motioned him to return.

ALTOGETHER in the course of a few minutes he counted nine guards, all armed, all aware of his identity. When he re-entered the house Commander Greer was there with Ann.

"Sorry, Captain," he said, "but we

just couldn't take any chances. Grannis advised us that there was going to be a rebellion and so we've ordered all officers to report to their units. Just in case there is a disturbance you leave right after dinner for Shadow City."

Greer remained for dinner. As Cargill and Ann followed him to the outer hall when the meal was over she whispered, "Find some way of kissing me good-by. I'll pretend to resist."

A volor-powered floaterlike craft waited for them on the lawn. Cargill turned to Ann and, mustering all his sardonicism said, "Miss Reece, once it amused you to say that you would kiss me good-by when I left like this. I demand that kiss."

He didn't wait for assent. Firmly he stepped up to her, put his finger under her chin, lifted her head and bent his own. The kiss he gave her was outrageously bold and the only trouble was that she didn't resist very hard. Fortunately the guards thought it was an attack and pulled him violently away from her.

"Good-by, darling," said Cargill cheerfully. "I'll be back."

He meant it. He liked Ann Reece. And, besides, this was war. "I love them all," he told himself with an almost drunken blurriness. "Ann, Lela and—" He thought of some of the wonderfully personable girls who had been the milestones in his life up until 1946.

He realized he was indulging in self-pity.

The metal door clanged shut behind him. The ship lifted violently. As he sank into a seat the black reality of his position crushed down upon his spirits.

* * * * *

"You can see Shadow City," said the pilot, "if you look straight ahead through the mist." He broke off. "Ed, give Captain Cargill your seat."

They had invited him into the control room voluntarily. The pilot's voice was friendly. Cargill had recognized none of the five volormen aboard, but undoubtedly they were among those to whom he had lectured.

The co-pilot promptly yielded his seat. Cargill settled into it and looked. Fog and haze blurred the horizon ahead. Mountain peaks seemed to waver in the uncertain light. It was hard to distinguish one shape from another.

SUDDENLY then he saw the pyramid. It was uneven to his vision and very small, as the peak of a stupendous mountain seems toylike from afar. He estimated that it must be at least a hundred miles ahead.

The floater continued to move toward it at normal floater speed. This was natural enough—Cargill had gathered that they didn't want the Shadows to suspect anything unusual about this particular machine. Besides, the ship was not built to attain volor velocity. They had evidently installed a volor-type motor so that it could travel at night. Actually the night speed had been very sedate.

Half an hour went by and all that time the fantastic city ahead grew larger. The towering pyramid shape came into sharper and sharper focus. At ten miles, it was a tremendously high pointed structure, set on a vast base. It straddled a nest of mountains.

At five miles the pyramid resembled a slope of glass through which Cargill could see the buildings inside, mostly residences, hard to see because of the foliage of towering trees. There were commercial buildings concentrated in the central area.

Seen close-up it was hard to believe that the pyramid was a powerful energy screen. It was even harder to grasp that he was here to disconnect the energy of the screen so that the Tweeners could dive down in their marvelous volors upon the unprotected metal and concrete of Shadow City—shadow no more.

"We land below there at the terminal." The pilot pointed at a building that stood at the edge of a forest.

No other words were spoken. The floater came gently down on the greensward a hundred and fifty feet from the low long building. Cargill stepped out without being asked. The door clicked shut behind him. He watched as

the machine rose into the sky and headed off toward the east.

Cargill turned and automatically started toward the terminal. Abruptly he stopped short.

"Just a moment," he thought, "I'm free. They didn't wait to make sure that I would go in. Why shouldn't I just head downhill and lose myself in the wilderness?"

It looked immeasurably desolate—peaks and crags and valleys and ravines and everywhere the primitive forest. It would probably take several days to reach the foothills.

But it was a way out. Cargill made as if to turn. Nothing happened. He stood very still, startled. He remembered the tube that had "trained" him. Carefully he walked forward, then abruptly tried to twist on his heels. The muscles wouldn't respond.

Pale but determined he thought, "I'll just stay here. I'll act so queerly that the Shadows will become suspicious."

His legs began to move, easily, naturally, without any sense of strain. He tried to stop them but it was as if he had forgotten how. Involuntarily, but without any of the appearance or feeling of being an automaton, he walked across the lawn toward the terminal building.

He was able to pause at the door, but only long enough to peer briefly through the thick glass into a marble alcove. A young woman inside smiled at him and pressed a button. The door opened.

A moment later Cargill was inside.

CHAPTER XV

Unexpected Welcome

CARGILL paused again just inside the door. In spite of his tenseness, he was curious. He stared with interest and some excitement at the young woman behind the alcove desk. A Shadow? he wondered.

She had something of the intellectual look that he'd half expected. But there was an intensity about her also—it was hard to define.

The young receptionist smiled and said in a rich, emotional voice, "We're so very glad to see you here of your own free will. We welcome you with all our hearts. We wish you luck. We want you to be one of us."

Cargill studied her warily. He recognized an emotional appeal when he heard one and he was impressed by the psychology of it. He was not so prepared to accept it for himself. He had too many walls erected against chance breakthroughs of an emotional nature.

The young woman was speaking again. "You go through this door," she said. She pressed a button.

Cargill had already glanced through the door. It was wonderfully transparent and led into a corridor that slanted off to the right. He could only see a portion of it and that was a marble wall.

He smiled at the receptionist, said, "Thank you!" and walked through the door she had opened for him. Two nice-looking older women—Cargill guessed about forty years each—sat at a records section to the right.

One of them said, "You're a fine-looking young man. We wish you luck."

The other came out from behind the counter. "Come with me."

She led the way along a corridor that was lined with glass-fronted cubbyholes. They reminded Cargill of the way some department stores arranged their credit sections. In each office was a desk and two chairs. Cargill's guide paused at one of the entrances.

"Here's your prize of the day, Moira." She touched Cargill's arm lightly. "Good luck, young man."

"Thank you."

He spoke automatically, then walked into the office. The young woman looked up and surveyed him thoughtfully for a moment.

Then she said, "I like you."

"Thanks," said Cargill somewhat drily. It seemed to him he was beginning to get the idea. And it was pretty terrific. In little more than a minute they

had tried to make him welcome. He saw that Moira was studying him understandingly.

"You're a cynic?" she said.

That was unexpected. Cargill protested, "I think you've got an excellent system."

"It didn't hurt me to say I liked you," said the girl, "so I said it. Do you mind closing the door?"

Cargill closed it and said, "It's a very good technique for making new arrivals feel at home."

She shook her head. "I'm very happy to disillusion you. That's the way we live. Part of our life is so tremendously intellectual, so precise and scientific, that we long ago adopted a warmly emotional personal approach on every level of our community life. You'll see when you get into the city. But now, please sit down."

As Cargill complied, she took out a card and picked up a pen. "You're Morton Cargill, aren't you?"

Cargill stiffened. He had had a false name quivering on the tip of his tongue. Now he sank a little lower in his chair, silent and alarmed. It seemed to him that he had no recourse but to admit the truth.

The chilling effect of the identification grew. He had a sense of being finally committed. Everything he had done since coming to the twenty-fourth century had been done under pressure. And yet, throughout, he'd had the feeling that he would be able to control his destiny. That feeling was gone. In spite of all his actions and counteractions here he was just where the plotters wanted him to be.

HE braced himself to the reality. His opposition, it seemed to him, must now be narrowed down to one individual. If he could somehow kill Grannis that, and that alone, might still sway the balance.

Aloud he said, "Am I expected?"

She nodded but said nothing. He watched as she wrote down his name, his nervousness growing. He thought of more implications of the recognition. Mentally he pictured himself back in the original therapy room, being killed while Betty Lane—who had made the original complaint against him—looked on. It put a pressure on him. He had to have more information.

"I don't understand how you could possibly know my name. Do you know in advance the name of everyone who comes here?"

"Oh, no. You're special." She looked up. "You've come for the training, of course?"

It was only partly a question. The point was one which she evidently wanted to be taken for granted. Cargill decided temporarily to abandon his effort to find out how these people had learned his name. The young woman smiled at him again. She looked so young suddenly that he said with impulsive curiosity:

"Are you a Shadow?"

The girl nodded. "Yes, I am."

"You don't always maintain the Shadow shape then?"

"Whatever for?" She seemed genuinely astonished. "That's a highly specialized state of being." As if she suspected his instant fascination with the subject matter she said hurriedly, "Have you any idea what your responsibilities will be when you become a Shadow?"

Cargill noted that she said "when" and not "if." It gave him a heady sensation and emboldened him to ask directly, "How did you know my name?"

"Time paradox."

"You mean something has—already—happened that you know about but I don't?"

She nodded.

"What?" asked Cargill with automatic absorption.

She shrugged. "It's really very simple. For your own private reasons you've been doing things for months. We don't know why but it brought you to our attention."

Cargill was cautious. "No one has investigated my reasons?"

The woman smiled. "Naturally not. But now—it's customary for me to explain what our work is."

Cargill restrained the questions that quivered on his lips. He forced himself to sit back. He watched the woman intently as she spoke.

"We shadows," she began, "are trying to undo the effects of the psychological disaster that demoralized the human race, beginning in the Twentieth century. The pressure of civilization was apparently too much for millions of people.

"Everywhere men sought escape and they found the means late in Nineteen Eighty in the newly invented floaters. When it became apparent that a mass flight from responsibility was under way psychologists searched frantically for the causes.

"Naturally, in accordance with their training, they looked into the immediate past of each individual and so it was only gradually that they learned the truth.

"It was an inherited weakness, the result of experiences and disasters that had befallen the affected bloodline, sometimes one, sometimes many generations earlier. Jung, one of the pioneer analysts, suspected its existence very early. He called it the ancestral shadow.

"After many years of experiment, a technique was developed for reaching into the past and rectifying to some extent the effects of the original disaster. The results are becoming more apparent to us every year. Planiacs are accepting our training in ever-increasing numbers.

"Unfortunately, since they start from such a low level of culture, most of them fail in their purpose. The result of the test, I must explain, is something we cannot control. It is purely mechanical.

"The individual either responds to the training and becomes a Shadow or does not respond and so gains only the educational benefits that enable him to become a Tweener. But the Shadow shape depends on a balance within the individual. We know how that balance functions but we have no artificial method for producing it. Do you understand that?"

Cargill said, genuinely interested, "What types of people generally succeed?"

"Your type," said Moira. She stood up. She pointed at a closed door to his right—which he hadn't noticed till that instant. "You go through there. Good luck."

Cargill stood up uncertainly but he opened the door. There were a grassy lawn outside and a spread of flowering shrubs that hid his view. He stepped across the threshold, walked around the shrubbery and saw with a start that he was inside Shadow City.

WITH a hissing intake of his breath Cargill stopped. He was on a plateau, looking down at the city proper. But how had he come here so quickly? It was a mile at least to the terminal center where he had reported.

In spite of his previous knowledge of their method of transportation he felt compelled to turn around and investigate. When he looked he saw that there was a shallow cliff behind him. It was about fifty feet high and it was covered with growth. Flowers of every hue peered from among shining green leaves and the dry cool air was heavy with the blended perfume.

For a moment, Cargill stood there, breathing deeply in relaxed enjoyment, and then he saw the door. It was in the side of the cliff. He went to it and it seemed ordinary enough. On impulse he turned the knob, pushed and stepped through. He was back in terminal center.

The woman was still at her desk. "Curious?" she asked.

Cargill said intently, "How does it work?"

She pointed up at the top of the door frame. "There's a tube up there. It focuses on you as you step over the threshold."

"Is it instantaneous?"

She shook her head. "Not exactly."

Cargill hesitated. Another thought had struck him. There had been no resistance to his returning here. The "training" Ann Reece had given him had, earlier, prevented him from so

much as turning around but now he had come back a mile and a half.

"If I could tell this woman about Grannis," he thought tensely.

He parted his lips, swallowed, tried again but no words came. He guessed the explanation. His return this time had been natural, had had nothing to do with opposition to the "training." The moment, however, that he had consciously tried to take advantage of the situation the pressure resumed.

He found himself struggling against the inhibition as he stood there. It was a silent fight but desperate for all that. He could think the words. He could even imagine the exact shape his mouth should take to utter them. But they didn't come.

He swallowed again, and gave it up. He said quietly, "I guess I'd better be going."

He stepped through the door and found himself once more in the park. A minute later he was walking along a pathway when he heard the sweet sound of a child's laughter. A woman said something in a pleasant voice. Presently mother and daughter—Cargill assumed the relationship—emerged from behind a large path.

Cargill watched them out of sight behind a line of brush. He was trying to picture this city, its protective screen gone, attacked by swarms of volors. It was a deadly scene he visualized and it stiffened him. Because he had to stop it—had to.

He turned down the hill, and came after a little to a street. A line of floaters, drawn in to the curb, stretched out of sight behind a bend. A signboard read:

NEWCOMERS
Use These Floaters
GO TO
Square Building
AT CENTER OF BUILDING

Cargill climbed into one of the machines, guided it up and in the indicated direction. He had no difficulty finding the square building. It was surrounded by a series of round structures, and on its roof was a huge sign that spelled out:

TRAINING CENTER

Another smaller sign said:

Land on Roof

Once out of the floater Cargill followed a line of arrows to a doorway, down a flight of marble stairs and into a marble corridor. Both sides of the hall were lined with transparent plexiglass doors and there was a woman at a great desk behind a counter to his left. Cargill walked over to her. He identified himself a little nervously and she consulted a folder.

"You will receive your first training," she said pleasantly, "in cubicle eleven. It's down the corridor to your right." She smiled at him. "Good luck."

His heels clacked on the marble floor as he walked and that gave him a cozy feeling of being in friendly surroundings. This coming to Shadow City had burdened his mind with the fear that he would find only the alien and the unknown.

But the human beings he had met so far were the friendliest and most relaxed he had ever seen. That made him uneasy for it didn't fit at all with the ruthless—therapy—they had planned for him. And yet there was the little girl he had seen in the park—so childlike, so normal.

He could feel the pressure of this gathering crisis closing in upon him. What to do?

The thought ended as he came to cubicle eleven, hesitated, opened the door and stepped inside.

CHAPTER XVI

Grannis

THE cubicle was larger than the one in which he had been interviewed at terminal center. Except for that it looked very similar at first sight. A desk,

one chair (not two) and another door—he wondered if it led to some remote point. There was also a mirror on the wall to his left.

He had a strong will to know his surroundings, so he tried the door. It was locked. As he turned back a voice spoke out of the air in front of him.

"Sit down, please."

The tone was friendly. Tense in spite of that, not knowing what to expect, Cargill seated himself. The voice spoke again.

"See this!"

The room flashed into pitch darkness and in the air only about two feet in front of Cargill's eyes appeared a stream of radiant energy. It was a delicate lacework of brightness, as if he were looking at a filament out of its vacuum environment.

The voice said, "You are witnessing electron flow in a vacuum tube. Now watch."

The direction of the flow began to change. It followed a more winding path, and it seemed to be turning on some kind of an axis. Several moments passed before he saw that the flow direction was a distinct spiral.

The voice said, "Old in mathematics is the idea that two forces exerted at right angles to each other produce a diagonal curve of motion. And so one times one may equal one and one-half or some fraction thereof, something other than it might equal in the old classical mathematics. Watch as we bring the spirals closer together."

To Cargill they had seemed close as they were. But now as he stared at the filament the spiraling line of light seemed to draw together, a tiny bit only. "One times one times one times one times zero," said the voice, "equals a million."

Again there was a change in the flow. The filaments were closer together.

". . . . equal a billion," said the voice.

There was a pause. The filament glowed on. Then the voice said, "Now, we superimpose ordinary infra-red light powered by a tiny battery. And we have —a spitgun."

The outline of a spitgun appeared in the air and Cargill saw how the tube was fastened into it, how the battery powered it.

"We superimpose," said the voice, "a magnetic field. Now we can bend steel."

Cargill saw how that was done.

The voice went on, "We superimpose ordinary sunlight—and we have a sun-motor, power source of the floater. A score of energy possibilities suggest themselves."

In quick succession, three were shown, how the volor worked, a method of turning a wheel and the way thoughts were imposed on a brain.

"Now," said the voice, "would you like to do these various things with your own mind? We focus a millionpower brainpattern tube on the somaesthenic centers of the parietal lobe of the left hemisphere of the brain—since you are right handed—and establish a high conditionality of flow patterned exactly after that of the steptube itself. We thus create a *nerve* tube in the brain.

"Since it is not possible for you in your normal body to superimpose other rhythms on the flow of this organic tube we use the new control to alter slightly the atomic pattern of the body. And so, by drawing on the broadcast power of the pyramid screen, we create the Shadow shape. Young man, look at yourself in the mirror."

The light came on. Cargill, in spite of the words not knowing what to expect, stepped over to the mirror.

A Shadow image was reflected back at him.

"Oh, my lord!" he thought. He looked down at himself. He was a Shadow, too.

He began to feel the difference. His vision sharpened. He turned toward the mirror. It seemed now to be less substantial, as if most of the light were coming through it. Through it, beyond it, he looked.

He stood on a height and his vision was Olympian. A speck in the distant sky beyond the now completely invisible pyramid touched his tension. His vision leaped to it. It was a bird, a hawk, wheeling in flight.

ASTOUNDED at the remarkable telescopic effect he drew back into the room and looked at the floor. It half-dissolved before his eyes and then became as transparent as glass. He looked down at the floor below, down into the soil beneath.

It was bright and dark brown, then gray stone, then brown-red soil, than a dark shale, then—it was harder to see. Some kind of clay, he decided finally. Below that he couldn't make it out at all. He drew his gaze back, conscious that there were depths he could not penetrate.

The voice said, "Now, we bring you back to normal. Please notice though that what counted was the direction of your attention. The general secret is vibration and visualization."

The mirror was visible again. The image of Morton Cargill was reflected back at him.

The voice said, "That is all for today. Congratulations, Morton Cargill. Your body responded easily to all the mechanical manipulation, which is unusual even for a Tweener and almost impossible to a Planiac.

"Except for some minor conditioning you can now make yourself a Shadow at will, merely by thinking it so. The second door is now unlocked. It leads to a series of apartments. The ones that show a green light are unoccupied and you may select one of them as your own for the time being. Good luck."

The apartment he entered was surprisingly large, five rooms and two baths. Cargill explored it hurriedly, stopped only when he saw the phone. It was in a little alcove and it included a TV scanner and a viewing plate against the wall.

On the lower right corner of the viewer—and it was that that interested him—was a series of small knobs. Above them was the word:

DIRECTORY

With fingers that trembled he first explored the mechanical process, then manipulated the three knobs that had the letters of the alphabet arranged on them. He set the first one for G, the next for R, the third and last for A. Then he pressed the switch.

A long list of names flashed on to the viewer—*Granger, Granholm, Grannell, Grant*—

There was no Grannis listed.

"But that's ridiculous," Cargill thought. "Now is the time for me to get hold of him before he can transmit the cue word to me."

At the moment he could turn the equivalent of a mobile spitgun on Grannis before the man could suspect his intention or change into the protective Shadow shape. Surely he would be vulnerable in his human form.

"I've got to find him," he told himself, "there must be some reason why he isn't listed. If I could only ask questions about that?"

There was a clock in the livingroom and it showed ten mintues after ten. That galvanized him. Suppose they had selected today for him to disconnect the pyramid switch.

He left the apartment hurriedly by an entrance that opened onto a winding street, a shopping center. The stores were crowded with shoppers and he had to stifle an impulse to go into one of the spacious buildings. He did pause to peer in at a window but that merely emphasized the normalcy of the whole situation.

He pressed on. He was a man with a deadly mission who had no idea where he ought to go to carry it out. He only knew that it must be done quickly.

For awhile he walked feverishly along quiet shady streets. Here in the residential area quiet cozy houses were set well back in their flower and shrub gardens. Children played in most of the yards. At different times he saw both men and women working among the shrubs. Not once did he see a Shadow.

It was a rôle and a state they must assume for time travel and when danger threatened. Tensely Cargill wondered how quickly they could put on their protective cloaks of darkness.

And minute after minute he looked on the name plates for the name Gran-

nis. As the morning lengthened towards midday the virtual impossibility of his search being successful penetrated deeper. A man who was not even listed in the directory would not be locatable by a hasty street-to-street search in a city of more than a hundred thousand people.

HE admitted defeat abruptly and hurried back toward his apartment. "I'll stay inside," he thought. "I won't answer the door. I won't answer the phone. That way no one can give me the cue."

He had the empty feeling that he had made a mistake leaving the place at all. As he approached the square building his watch—which he had set by the clock in the apartment—pointed at twenty minutes to twelve. Cargill began to perspire.

He was surprised to notice that several hundred people were gathered in front of an entrance to one of the great round buildings. Cargill asked one of them, "What's going on?"

The stranger glanced at him with a good-natured smile. "We're waiting for the announcement," he said. "We received notice from the future that the results of an election held several years from now would be announced today and go into effect immediately. It—"

Cargill hurried on. So they had elections, did they? He felt immensely cynical and critical until he thought, "From the future—but that's ridiculous! And —why, that would mean this danger was overcome." He recalled that he had been told it was impossible for a person to go into his own future without assistance. He'd have to ask questions about that.

He reached his apartment at last. As he entered the door a voice from the phone alcove said to him mechanically, "You are to report at once to Office One, Building C. Grannis requests that you report to Office One, Building C. You are to report to Office—"

"Oh, my word!" thought Cargill.

Grannis had located himself.

Swiftly after his first shock Cargill emerged from his daze. This was it.

"I'll practise being a Shadow," he thought grimly. "I'll superimpose the spitgun tube and then—"

It seemed to him that he couldn't escape the necessity, in spite of somebody coming from the future to hold an election. Everything that had happened so far he had forced by his own actions. Even knowing of the paradox did not relieve him of responsibility until he personally had done what was required.

As of now only he knew of the imminent catastrophe, personal as well as national. Across the land Tweener and Planiacs must be tensing for their desperate rôles.

Cargill walked forward, shut off the automatic repeating device on the phone and left his apartment. Outside he asked a passerby which was Building C. A few minutes later he was at his destination.

The man in Office One of Building C was a large pleasant looking individual with a touch of gray in his hair. He seemed about sixty years of age. He did not ask Cargill to sit down. He stood up.

"I'm getting old," he said to Cargill. "In spite of all my shuttling around, in spite of having lived altogether about a thousand years, old age has finally caught up with me. I used to think that would never happen."

He chuckled. "I've been Grannis now for eighty-seven years, so I'm rather glad that someone has been selected to replace me. It's unusual for a newcomer to be chosen but the choice was made by the people of the future and they will have good and sufficient reasons for it. And so"—he waved at the large room—"here it is."

He became businesslike. "It won't take you long to learn your duties. Protector of the State—that's easy. To do that properly you've got to live periodically among the Tweeners. They're the ones that have to be watched.

"What I did was to marry a Tweener girl—that's in addition to my Shadow wife—but she died four years ago for the last time." He didn't explain that but went on, "I haven't been near the

Tweeners since then, so I suggest you take a look at what they're up to sometime soon."

He finished, "Then of course you sign documents authorizing therapies. You have no veto power on that but"—he smiled—"you'll get onto it."

He held out his hand, "And now, before I go, any questions?"

CHAPTER XVII

The Therapy

GRANNIS!" said Cargill at that point. His mind had been a receptive blank. Now there was thunder.

The old man was amused. "As a newcomer," he said, "you won't know about our history. We started as a legal secret society with all the ritual, including resounding titles. Our leader was called The Grandest Guy. For short we addressed him satirically as Grandest, which, since it meant nothing to us, we eventually slurred down to Grannis."

"Grannis!" Cargill repeated. He had a blinding vision of the truth, a mental picture of one man using the time energy, first to save his own life, then to prevent an unnecessary war, finally to establish himself in the twenty-fourth century as the Grannis of the Shadows.

He said tautly, "Will you tell me a little bit more about my duties?"

As he listened his mind soared so swiftly that only a part of the meaning came through. His body was warm with excitement. His thoughts were vague and roseate and at first he had no desire to establish any logical connection with reality.

He was Grannis, who would now plan the Planiac attack on the Tweeners and the Tweener attack on the Shadows. He would do that not because of any traitorous scheme but because it was the way things had already happened.

Unsteadily, he halted the wilder gyrations of his thoughts. Tensely he recalled the way he had been taken back to the therapy room here in Shadow City and so on to the Tweener capital. Why had that been necessary? How did that fit?

Why live over again a period of this age—when all he had to do was come to the terminal center, enter Shadow City and be on hand for the only kind of election where the electorate could decide on an officeholder's capacity *after* his term?

There was, of course, the fact that Grannis had merely tried to control, under great difficulties, plots that were already in the making. As Grannis he would be forced to act according to Morton Cargill's knowledge of what had happened. As Cargill he had acted according to Grannis' interference.

He paused, astounded. "Just a moment," he thought. "That doesn't make sense. We can't both act according to what the other did. That would make it a closed circle—"

The older man interrupted him as he reached that point in his logical progression. "Well, I see it's halfpast twelve. I'll leave you to familiarize yourself with the office. You've got assistants in the outer office. Don't hesitate to use them."

Once more he held out his hand. This time Cargill shook it. After the man had gone he stood for awhile stolidly and then he thought, "Did he say halfpast twelve?"

A clock on the wall indicated that it was now thirty-seven and a half minutes after high noon. Cargill stared at it shakily. He should have known that they wouldn't give him the cue so quickly after his arrival.

He remembered what the voice had told him when he first found himself in the therapy room after being transported from the cocktail bar in Los Angeles, 1946—that the body reacted with final positivity only to the impact of real events. Here was a real event. The cue to disconnect the pyramid switch had not been given him. He had approximately twenty-four hours to prevent it from ever being given.

Confidence surged through him. In

his mind's eye he could see exactly what he must do. But first there was one little item—how had the Shadow therapists reacted to the disappearance of Morton Cargill from their therapy room two months ago now? There must be a record of the incident. It would be here in one of the files of the Grannis.

He found the record almost at once. With a pale face Cargill read the notation under his name.

Morton Cargill, 1946. Recommended therapy: "To be killed in the presence of Betty Lane." Disposition: "Therapy executed at 9:40 A.M. Comments: "Subject seemed unusually calm at time of death."

That was all there was. Apparently, the process was so automatic that the everyday details were left out. Only the bare facts were permanently recorded. And they were simple.

Morton Cargill, despite all his frantic maneuverings, had somehow landed back in the therapy room—and, without the Shadows even being aware of his wanderings, had at his proper time been given the prescribed treatment.

There was no mention of what had been done with the body.

Cargill emerged slowly from his profound depression. "I don't believe it," he told himself. "Surely, as Grannis, I could have faked that report."

He read it again and saw that it was signed by two names in addition to his own and stamped with an official seal. That shook him a little but stubbornly he held to his conviction.

Besides, for all he knew, the death scene might be a thousand years in his future. These Shadows, with their tremendous understanding of life processes, had created the environment for just such a paradox.

The possibility definitely cheered him. He looked around the spacious office. He walked over and glanced out of a window that overlooked the lovely mountain city. For a moment then he was dazzled. He was the Grannis of the Shadow people. He could move through all the past ages of man at will.

"And all I've got to do," he thought, "is make sure that everything happens as I know it happened."

Hastily he prepared for the paradox. First he changed himself into a Shadow and back again several times. He stood finally as a Shadow, thinking, "I want to go back to—" He named the destination mentally. He waited but nothing happened. That was startling but he refused to accept the defeat.

"I must be using the wrong technique," he told himself. The trouble was —what could be the right one? He remembered what the Shadow instructor had said about vibration and visualization.

He changed from the Shadow shape and thought, "What basic vibration can I use as a measure?" The only one he could remember was middle C on the musical scale. He hummed the C softly as he figured out on paper how many middle C vibrations there were in a day.

He changed back to the Shadow shape, visualized his destination again. Then he hummed middle C—and *thought* the number of vibrations.

He felt a tingle—indescribable.

SO, two hours before the volor-powered floater with Morton Cargill aboard left the Tweener capital for Shadow City, another Morton Cargill contacted Withrow. As a result, half an hour after the first Cargill was on his way and before any real counter-action could take effect, the Tweener revolution was launched.

The complete surprise achieved a virtually bloodless victory nearly ten hours ahead of schedule. The cue words, which were to have been sent to him to disconnect the pyramid switch, would never be uttered.

The Shadow Grannis-Cargill headed back to the floater on which Lela Bouvy and another Morton Cargill were trapped. The moment he was inside the floater he transferred the "earlier" Cargill to the glass-walled therapy room in Shadow City, where—presently—Ann Reece would rescue him for the second time.

As Grannis he returned immediately to the floater. Ignoring the cringing

Lela he walked through to the engine room. After the training he had received he needed only one glance at the drive tube to notice that the light-focusing lens had been jarred out of position. He reached in with Shadow fingers and adjusted it. The floater started to rise immediately as normal energy-flow was resumed.

Lela safe, he visited Carmean on the night that Lela and Morton Cargill escaped in Carmean's floater. By making casual references to previous meetings he found out from Carmean when and where they had taken place.

He began to keep a diary of his movements, then thought in an anguish of self-annoyance, "Why, of course, this very diary will be up there in the future. I'd have put it where it would be easy to find."

He located it in the top drawer of Grannis' desk. The list was there, complete with names, places and actions taken.

It seemed to him, gloomily, there was only one item missing from that comprehensive record of a man's determination to do everything he had to do. The list contained no hint of any method to keep Morton Cargill from being given the therapy of death.

All through the weeks—in actual time lived—that followed he had the memory of that therapy nagging at the back of his mind. He rejoined Lela and pushed the Planiac rebellion. There was no doubt of its success after Carmean and the other bosses were captured. To the sullen prisoners he offered a choice. They must either take the Shadow training or be taken to Tweener land.

They chose the training, failed without exception and became Tweeners.

Cargill performed every action listed in his diary, right down to meeting the obscure Lauer and receiving from him the transport instrument entrusted to that rebellious individual by Ann Reece.

The job done, he returned to Office One, Building C, Shadow City, one minute after his previous departure. The time was 1:01 P.M. Only a few hours had gone by in Shadow City since he had first arrived at terminal center.

At five minutes after one the phone rang. It was the instructor who had given him Shadow training.

"If you will come to cubicle eleven," he instructed Cargill, "we will complete your training. There isn't much but still it is a part of our pattern."

Cargill walked over to the cubicle, thinking, "If only I could ask a question in such a way that I wouldn't give myself away—about that death scene."

He had tried to imagine just how he might be present when the therapy was executed but he rejected the idea. There was such a thing as straining a paradox to the point where it wouldn't work.

As soon as he had entered cubicle eleven the light went out and the disembodied voice spoke out of the air in front of him.

"Long ago, when we first discovered the processes involved, we decided that every Shadow must go through the experiences of death and of course revival. The reason for this is the universal fear of death. When a person actually goes through death and is brought back to life the associative terror is gone forever except in rare cases.

"The process of dying also has other effects on the system. Particularly it breaks forever certain types of tensions. For this latter reason we do not hesitate to recommend it as a therapy for people we bring out of the past in our inter-time psychological work—"

"What's that?" Cargill said at that point. "What did you say?" But he did not utter the startled questions out loud.

The instructor continued, "We always revive the therapy patient after he and the complaining party are convinced on the action level that death has indeed taken place, though the complainant is never aware of the resurrection.

"Many of these latter are morally shocked by what has happened but we use the million tube to persuade them that justice has been done. And with that combination and that only the effect we want is achieved."

Cargill said slowly, "This death ex-

perience—can the same person undergo it several times without being harmed?"

"Very few Shadows," was the reply, "would live to be a thousand years old if that were not true. You cannot imagine the number of accidents that take place despite all precautions."

He finished with a hint of irony in his tone, "We do not, however, recommend the death experience more than a dozen times. The cells begin to remember the process."

Cargill hesitated. "There's another thing that's been bothering me. Can I go into my own future?"

"No. Only a pattern which has already occurred can be repeated by the body. For you to go into the future from here would require that somebody from the future pull you 'up.' The pattern would then be established, and you could operate from that particular future into the past."

"I see," nodded Cargill. He paused again, then, "Are you going to give me the death experience here?"

"Yes."

"Now?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Like this."

Something bright flashed in his eyes. He died instantly.

CHAPTER XVIII

The Ultimate Reality

HE awakened from that first death, feeling calm and rested. Certain tensions in his mind must have been relaxed for he remembered that he still had several things to do before he could be certain he was in this age to stay.

There was, for instance, that very first time when Ann Reece had brought Captain Morton Cargill, newly arrived from the twentieth century, to a marble room where he had had an opportunity to see and be seen by the Shadow Grannis. The reason for that had been obscure. Now, it was suddenly clear.

"Of course," he thought, "it was important that Cargill see a Shadow. Besides that was the simplest way to get back the transport instrument that had to be loaned to Ann so that she could make the rescue."

And there was the matter of the false notions the Tweeners and Planiacs had had about what the Shadows could and could not do. Some of that was due to their own ignorance of course but Grannis must have confirmed their ideas with deliberate intent to deceive.

And finally the fact that there had been previous getaways. It seemed incredible now that they had escaped by themselves. He must have helped them. Why? In order to establish among Planiacs the reality of the existence of such people, so that when Morton Cargill came along his identity as a getaway would be taken for granted.

Cargill sighed. The task of establishing oneself in the future was an intricate one, involving many details.

But he carried these out, one by one—and afterwards headed for the therapy room in Shadow City for his second death experience.

* * * * *

The blackness ended. When he opened his eyes Shadows were bending over him. The two technicians straightened and he saw that he was in a large laboratory. A machine floated in the air above him.

It was alive with lights, thousands of tiny lights that waxed and waned as if reacting to infinitesimal pressures from some invisible source. One of the Shadows walked away. The other gazed down at Cargill for a moment with inscrutable glittering eyes and then made an unmistakable gesture.

Sit up!

He realized the difference within himself, as he obeyed. He felt refreshed and energized, wonderfully alert and alive. And they must have used the million-tube on him also to educate him as to the why of what had happened. For he knew with a sharper under-

standing that he had been relaxed and that Betty Lane had had the equivalent of a cathartic experience.

Old, old was that pattern. Punishment is known among animals and when there is none neurosis strikes as deeply into the mind of the beast as any comparable situation in man. A bull elephant, nursing along his females, is attacked by a larger bull and is driven into the jungle. The injustice of it tears him to pieces, and after a time a dangerous rogue elephant roams the forests.

There was a hell before heaven was thought of. Once people were hanged for stealing a shilling—until twenty-five cents ceased to be an important sum. Morality changes, of course. The crime of one generation is common practise in the next and so a thousand easements come automatically to the tensed descendants of people who did not have the satisfaction of catharsis.

But there are eternal verities. Murder will be paid for by someone. Gross obscenities leave their impress on the blood stream. Revolutions and wars conducted without regard for the humanities—ah, but how they will be paid for. Disaster shocks the universe and the impulse goes on and on.

The shock waves of the collapse of vanished empires go on for ages.

The victim gains catharsis when the thief is captured and imprisoned. The prisoner, his guilt expiated by his imprisonment, also gains easement. There was only one thing wrong with that. As Cargill sat up, relaxed and free, he realized for the first time that there was still another thing he must do.

This "prisoner" had not yet committed the crime which would make it possible for Morton Cargill to come to the twenty-fourth century.

IT WAS 1943. A Shadow moved along a war-darkened street of Los Angeles. It took a little while to locate the exact cocktail bar. He couldn't remember clearly where he had been that night at the beginning of things.

Suddenly, however, he saw the unlighted sign that jerred his memory—ELBOW ROOM. A glance through the wall showed Morton Cargill inside.

There was no sign of Marie Chanette.

That puzzled Cargill. He stepped back into the darkness of a doorway across the street from the bar and for the first time seriously considered what he was about to do. He realized it had been in the back of his mind all these weeks and that he had deliberately forgotten it.

Somehow he had known that sooner or later he would have to come to the twentieth century and make sure that everything happened—as it had happened. He had to be certain that Marie Chanette did indeed die.

Cargill thought shakily, "Am I really going to let her be killed, knowing that I can stop it at any time up to the actual moment of the accident?"

Having put the question so sharply he had a sense of a desperate crisis.

It had to be done, he argued with himself. If he faltered now everything might be disarranged. He had been warned about trying to alter events. Only experts could do that and they only under special conditions.

He was still undecided when the drunken Lieutenant Cargill in the bar staggered to his feet and came out into the darkness.

But where was the girl?

The Shadow Grannis-Cargill had a sudden flash of insight. In abrupt excitement he projected himself over to the scene of the accident. He saw the wrecked car against a tree almost immediately. Inside was Marie Chanette. He examined her. She had been dead nearly an hour, judging by her condition.

Relieved, the Shadow hastened back to where Lieutenant Cargill was standing, swaying. The blur-minded Cargill was unaware of the being who hovered behind him, directing the power of a million-tube on him. Without his being aware of it, the belief was impressed on his mind that at this moment he was meeting Marie Chanette.

The hallucination firmly established, the Shadow was about to transport Cargill to the wreck when he thought, "All

I've got to do is go back about an hour in time and I can save Marie Chanette's life."

Cargill said aloud, "No!"

It was not really a rejection, he realized wretchedly. He tried to argue with himself. "If I once get started on a thing like this, I could spend the rest of my life just preventing accidents."

Even the Shadows didn't consider that a solution to the psychological problems with which they dealt.

"Besides," he told himself, "she did it herself. I'm not responsible in any way." Abruptly he realized he was not convincing himself. General truths simply did not apply. Marie Chanette was one woman in the vast universe, one bewildered human being on the drift of time. In the moment before her death she must have cried out in sudden agonized awareness of her fate.

Cargill made his choice—life for Marie Chanette. He stood grimly a few minutes later, watching her car come towards the scene of the accident. It would be dangerous for her if he got in beside her.

So he noted the direction from which she was coming, went back in time and space—and so by jumps traced her to the point where she came out of a night club accompanied by a soldier. The two were quarreling bitterly in drunken fashion. Cargill decided not to wait till he got disgusted. Before the girl could get into her car he transported her to her bedroom.

HE returned to what would normally have been the scene of the accident. "I'll wait here till the time for it is past."

The moment arrived when—earlier—Marie Chanette would have died.

In space-time, an energy thread "broke." No words can describe the intricacy of that "break." But the fabric of the universe "shifted" slightly. And that "shift" too cannot be described, cannot be thought or imagined.

A combination of forces concentrated on the "break" area. Cargill was snatched and flung a billion years into the future. He stood for a moment on a desolate hill overlooking a lake that glittered at him with radioactive fluorescence. The lake was in communication with another being on a remote star and, briefly, he was in the path of that abnormal telepathy. He learned something about reality in that instant which nearly wrecked his brain.

Then he was sinking. The time impulse yielded to the pressure of his presence—a new factor for it—and another thread "broke." The sudden threat of imminent chaos alarmed a group of associated cities a quadrillion years away in space and time. The great beings of that universe went to sleep as of one accord, thinking, "We mustn't interfere in *that* war."

Their thought touched Cargill, and he said aloud into fathomless night, "War? But it's not a war. It's a struggle between Balance and Variation, between Order and Change, between—" He could not name the final synonymic graduations. They had no name. They were process and unspeakable.

In that moment of awful revelation he knew who he was. He thought in anguish: "I've got to fight. I've got to get back."

The broken energy threads re-fused. Marie Chanette shook her head blurrily and climbed into her car. What puzzled her was the momentary conviction that she had been in her own bedroom. She was so intent on the thought that she forgot the soldier and drove away even as he was stumbling around to the other side to get in.

Grimly Cargill waited for the crash. When it was over he transported the earlier Cargill to the wrecked car and put him into it beside Marie Chanette. He took the pictures that would "later"—in 1946—shock Captain Cargill.

He waited there, then, until the terrible tensions in him let up, waited till he could think, "I've broken through the barriers of life and death. The whole sidereal universe is open to me now that I know the truth."

Satisfied, he returned to Shadow City. The cycle was complete.

Alfven experimented with the materializer

Stars Over Santa Claus

By WILLIAM MORRISON

It is more blessed to give than to receive—even when you use a materializer a hundred light years in space!

HURLEY paused in his shaving and asked almost casually, as if it didn't matter to him in the least, "Anything materialize in the past half hour?"

"Only this, sir," said Alfven respectfully, and held up a feathery body for him to see. By the light of the blue sun overhead it was a ghastly sight.

"What in space is that?"

"It started out as a turkey, Captain Hurley. They thought it would make a nice gift for the season. But the head

and one wing were lost, and the body was twisted in transit, and it doesn't look so appetizing. All the same, it's still edible—I think."

"If you think so, you'll have a chance to eat it," grunted Hurley. "Or else feed it to the Domes. Those creatures will swallow anything. By the way, you haven't been using my blowtorch, have you?"

"I always shave with my own."

Hurley rubbed his face thoughtfully. "This one feels a little hot. By Pluto, that's the last straw. When men a hundred light years from home start sneaking in the use of their captain's blowtorch, and don't have the common decency to tell him they need another, an expedition's really demoralized."

"Shall I have them materialize a replacement for you, sir?"

"This one's still good enough to use. Just doesn't keep to the right wavelength and give a cool enough shave any more. And I think we have better work for our materializer to do."

"Frankly, I think so too, Captain."

Hurley gave him a sour look. "Then why make a fool suggestion like the one for a replacement? Trying to please me? Alfven, you're a good kid, but you've been spoiled by that blasted Politeness course they give nowadays. Respect your captain and obey his orders—I go along with that. But only up to a certain point. Only up to the point where you still treat him as a human being, and not as a tin god. The trouble with you, sonny boy, is that you respect me too much."

"Yes, sir," said Alfven respectfully.

Hurley snorted. "I should have taken my wife along. Regulations or no regulations, I should have brought Clara with me. She'd have put an end to this confounded formality around here."

"I hear that Mrs. Hurley has great talents along that line, sir."

"You've heard right. Too bad she was tied up taking care of a sick kid. She's a lot better captain than I am. She's the best captain I ever heard of, bar none."

So even the captain was homesick. Alfven kept a discreet silence. He was younger than anyone had a right to be on an expedition of this kind, a mere twenty-five, and he looked practically infantile. His face was so pink and smooth that sometimes Hurley wondered whether he really used his blowtorch to shave or just pretended to. But it wasn't his youth that Hurley held against him. It was, as he said, that blasted Politeness, which was drilled into them in school, and served as a barrier against laxness of all kinds.

It was an old tradition, and even young Alfven admitted secretly that it was a stupid one. Back in the old days, it had been customary to dress for dinner in the fever-infested jungles of both Earth and Venus, to shave every day, and to maintain a pose of all-powerful majesty, both in order to awe supposedly inferior peoples and to keep a grip on a possibly rebellious crew. But the supposed inferiors had taken the absurdly formal behavior as a sign of insanity more than anything else, and the old crews had bitterly resented the airs that their captains gave themselves. The old tradition had not exactly been a success.

So it had been modified. Part of it, the old custom of shaving every day, had been kept. Now, of course, instead of sharp-edged razors, they used tiny induction heaters, tuned to the proper frequency for human hair. These efficient little gadgets, popularly known as blowtorches, burned the beard off a face smoothly and coolly, leaving it with a faint non-irritating tan. The part of the tradition that had to do with formal dress, on the other hand, had been discarded as too inconvenient. And the relationship of captain to crew had been changed. No longer was it one of master and near-slave. Now it was more like that of a group of gentlemen, among whom one happened to be First among Equals.

ACCORDING to regulations, the captain no longer gave orders, he merely addressed Requests. But on trips too far from home, some of the older captains, like Hurley, had a tendency to forget themselves and, especially in

emergencies, to tell their men what to do. Once in a while they might even curse mildly. But not much. They too had been subjected to a course in Politeness during their refresher training periods, and they couldn't quite break the shackles.

Alfven turned to his materializer, which had begun to work again, and made a slight adjustment of the tuning dial. He himself had begun to realize the disadvantages of the official Politeness some months back. It set a wall between officer and men, prevented them from sharing their hopes and fears. The intensity of Hurley's feelings had led him to talk of his wife, Clara. But Alfven felt slightly embarrassed as he listened, and he showed no inclination to encourage further discussion of the lady on Hurley's part.

Yes, the old reticences persisted, despite what they had gone through together. And they had gone through plenty. They had swept through a hundred light years of stellar space, they had narrowly by-passed a dark high-frequency emitting star, and they had finally come to rest on this bare and rocky planet in a crash landing that had killed half of their crew.

Fortunately, they had saved most of their instruments, particularly the materializers. It was these alone that permitted them to survive. It was too bad that the apparatus didn't work as well as it should have.

Another battered turkey was materializing, and Alfven looked at it in amused disgust. The intentions of Contact back home were undoubtedly good. But Contact's intelligence was nothing to brag about. It might better have used the apparatus to transmit more spare parts.

Rayton came in, a tired old man of thirty-five, stared at the turkey, and wonder of wonders, recognized what it was. "Why send us that?" he said in amazement. "We have enough to eat."

"Contact is being thoughtful. Christmas is coming."

"Pluto, you're right. Another month, isn't it?

"Twenty-nine days."

"I wonder if we'll last that long."

"Of course we will. We're going to set up a colony here."

Rayton laughed, somewhat bitterly. "We're setting up a cemetery. Do you know how many men we've got left unhurt? Ten. At the present rate, they won't last another two weeks. Why don't they send us more weapons?"

"They can't. As you know, the materializer doesn't work right."

"Is it the distance? I thought there was supposed to be no trouble up to a thousand light years."

"There usually isn't. But in our case there are interfering stresses in the transit path. The transmitting waves are distorted most of the time, and the major part of what they send us is ruined. The result is that Contact has to use at least half our transmission time merely to send repair parts for the purpose of keeping the materializer in working condition. And it spends most of the other time sending indispensable supplies. Weapons are in last place."

"And half of them, when they do come over, are useless. Frankly, Alfven, I think that this new-fangled method of establishing an advanced base and sending supplies by means of materializers is stupid. Space ships may be slower, but they're sure."

"Accidents happen to space ships too. And materializers do work most of the time. We happen to have picked a planet in a bad part of space."

Rayton looked at him as if it were the fault of his youth and inexperience that the apparatus didn't work. "Have you tried using different sorts of equipment?"

Alfven nodded. "I've tried all the standard circuits. And I've varied the size of the materializer, using parts they managed to get to me. Big ones are even worse. I'm working now on a small model that I hope will be less subject to distortion."

"Send a letter to Santa Claus," said Rayton cynically, "and maybe he'll tell you what to do."

"It won't exactly be a Merry Christ-

mas," admitted Alfven. "But I think that we'll be able to stick it out."

"If you mind can't turn out anything more brilliant than that, you'd better stop thinking," snarled Rayton, forgetting his own course in Politeness. "Personally, I can think of nothing better than to be out of here."

"The Domes make you nervous?"

"They certainly do. They keep reminding me of those imaginative pictures of men of the future—great brain-packed skulls, with wonderful minds that can probe yours at a glance. It doesn't do any good to tell myself that appearances are deceiving, that their heads are packed not with brains, but with complicated digestive organs, and that there's hardly a thought in a carload. They just make me feel uneasy."

"I sometimes feel the same way. I suppose we'd both get over it if we understood what made them tick."

"Not much chance of that," said Rayton. "If we had a psych expert as good as Franelli . . . But there's no use wishing. I could write a letter to Santa Claus too, asking him to cure Franelli, but I'm afraid it wouldn't do much good."

"Yes, it's too bad that he was so badly hurt in the crash."

WHICH brings up another thing," Rayton went on. "Our injured are never going to get well here. Either we haven't got the proper means of treatment, or there's something in the air that prevents cure."

"It's the captured Domes," said Alfven thoughtfully. "Our men can see them across a partition, and the sight isn't reassuring. The creatures sit there motionless, and our invalids wonder what's going on in those impressive heads. We should get rid of them."

"We ought to blast them."

"We can't do that. The other Domes would hear of it and probably launch an all-out attack."

"That's just a guess."

"We can't take a chance. We'll have to find another way to handle them."

"Let them go free," suggested Rayton.

"After they've had a chance to fight against us, and have acquired a taste for it?"

Rayton gritted his teeth and stared at the materializer, where another turkey was slowly making its appearance, this one stripped of its feathers.

"Look at that, will you. We face insoluble problems on all sides—and they send us mangled turkeys."

"They try," said Alfven defensively. "Their intentions are good."

"Intentions, my eye. Is the communicator working without distortion?"

"Perfectly."

"Then send Contact a message from me, personally. I'll tell you what to say."

"Whatever you wish. Within the limits of Politeness, of course."

Rayton made a disrespectful comment about Politeness, and turned away. Young Alfven sighed. The man was obviously badly demoralized. He wondered if it were Rayton who had used the captain's blowtorch.

While waiting for the next object to materialize—fortunately, it was a spare part for the materializer itself, and not another turkey—Alfven thought of that letter to Santa Claus, alias Home Contact. In a way, he would have to send one, for Contact would certainly expect a message of thanks and good wishes for its thoughtfulness in sending the turkeys. Politeness called for at least that.

He considered, too, the things he would ask for, the things the expedition needed if they were to live to eat those turkeys. They could all have been accommodated within the confines of a single space ship. A wife for Captain Hurley, new materializer supplies with innumerable spare parts, weapons, doctors, psych experts, and possibly one or two other specialists. And on the trip home, the ship would take back the sick and wounded, the captured Domes, and the demoralized. That wouldn't leave much of an expedition, but at least it would leave a happier one.

From outside came the hoarse and impolite call, "Alfven!"

"Yes, Captain?"

"Get out of your cell fast and give us a hand. We need you."

It was the first time he had been called from his important station at the materializer to assist in repelling the Domes. It made him realize exactly how serious the situation was. He set the instruments for automatic control, hoping that the tuning wouldn't shift, and hurried out.

In front of the expedition's camp, set at the top of a high hill, a long thin line of Domes advanced. They looked slow and topheavy, but they were quick to utilize every bit of cover on the steep slope, and as they darted from behind one rock to the next, they let loose with their slingshots, sending an endless shower of small and medium-sized stones at the defenders. The latter hugged the ground, and tried to laugh off the occasional hit that couldn't be avoided.

"They're in large numbers this time, aren't they, sir?" said Alfven.

"It's the biggest crowd we've seen yet. That's why I needed you. Next thing you know, I'll be putting the injured in the ranks to help fight them off."

"Would it be worth while to increase the deadliness of our weapons?"

The captain shook his head. "From the point of view of putting them out of commission, it's just as good to wound them as to kill them. From the point of view of saving ammunition, it's better to keep our weapons at low potential, and shock instead of kill."

"Contact really could have supplied us with more effective weapons, sir."

"I don't know what Contact could have done," said Hurley wearily. "The more effective the weapons, and the more damage we do, the more they counter-attack, and the worse it is for us. We could have taken along atomics that would have enabled us to blast half the planet, but then the other half would have ganged up on us and wiped us out in no time. Our only hope is to fight them off without doing enough damage to get them angry. And we can't do that for too long."

"Yes, it's a difficult spot," agreed Alfven, and with his blaster caught a Dome sprinting from one rock to the next. The creature fell down rubbing its thin legs, waved its arms unhappily for a moment, and then subsided.

The Domes seemed to be putting on speed, as if determined to get them for good this time. Stones fell around them faster than ever, and here and there Alfven saw one of the defenders stepping up the power on his blaster, forgetting common sense in the desire for revenge, the desire to hurt as badly as their comrades were hurt. That too was a sign of demoralization, and it worried him.

HALF an hour later, when the Domes had finally been beaten off, and teams went out to bring in the wounded as prisoners, Alfven returned to his materializer. Several more spare parts had arrived, one of them so badly twisted that it was useless, and another turkey was in process of solidification. He turned his eyes away from it, and thought of a name for the Polite idiots at Contact. Then, suddenly, a low humming noise came to his ears, so faint that at first he could hardly be sure he was hearing it.

He got up and turned down the corridor where the sick and wounded were cared for, whenever the camp was not under attack, and the defenders could spare them some attention. From the left, the imprisoned Domes glared at him from behind transparent sheets of thin neometal. At the right, a man was sitting up in bed, giving himself a shave.

"Hello, Dr. Franelli," said Alfven casually. "Feeling better?"

"I'm not sick." He spoke with the stubborn aggressiveness of a man who has received a severe blow on the head and never recovered.

"Glad to hear it. By the way, that's the captain's blowtorch. It's good to know that you can walk far enough to get it. Does the wavelength suit you?"

"Not quite. But a man has to shave. First rule of Politeness."

"Of course. Where's your own?"

"They tell me that the ship crashed. It disappeared then."

"Too bad. You know, the captain's been wondering who used his blowtorch. He's very touchy these days, too. Perhaps I'd better return it before he finds out that you've used it."

The sick man shook his head. "I like this one. I've decided to keep it."

"Come now, you know that's against all the rules of Politeness. You can't take away a man's personal property."

"A blowtorch isn't as personal as that. He can materialize another one for himself."

Alfven sighed. The man was a little out of his head or he wouldn't have acted that way, but there was no denying that from the point of view of common sense, he was right. All the same, the captain wouldn't like it. He might even try to remove his property from the sick man with polite force. The expedition had reached the point where tensions smoldered behind the Politeness, and even an incident as trivial as that could cause a blow-up.

"I'll tell him what you suggest," said Alfven. And then, for the first time, a warning yell came as a welcome relief. The Domes were attacking again, and he was needed to repel them.

This time, when he joined the defense line, he was not as lucky as before. A stone, descending in a swift parabola, caught him on the shoulder and left a bruise that would last for days. He felt a momentary impulse to step up the power of his own blaster and get the so-and-so who had hit him, but he resisted it. Later, however, when he felt how stiff his arm became, he was almost sorry he hadn't.

That night there was something new. Screaming awoke him, and he leaped from his soft plastic cot near the materializer, to find himself one of a dozen men rushing down the corridor. The invalids were awake too, and it took no more than a glance to see how frightened they were. They were staring through the transparent neometal at the Domes who were making the racket.

The noise died down, and Hurley said, "Now, what on earth—or on this blasted planet—set them off?"

"Might be a psychological attack to disturb our sleep," suggested Rayton.

"Don't be absurd, Rayton. They don't know that there is such a thing as psychology."

"I'm not being absurd, sir. And that's hardly Polite language."

"It may not be Polite, but it fits what you said. You talk like an idiot."

Rayton flushed. Alfven said hastily, "It sounded as if they were terrified. Captain."

"They were. Look at the tears rolling down their heads."

"But if their heads contain digestive organs, those may not be ordinary tears. They may be what we might call tears of laughter, and their howling might actually be laughing."

"Could be," admitted Hurley. "We can't tell without knowing what set them off. Anybody been down this corridor?"

No one answered. After a while Rayton said, "Perhaps they scented an attempt to rescue them."

"We haven't seen any signs of it outside. All right, men, let's get back to sleep and do some resting. Those of you on guard stay at your posts."

Alfven returned to his own cot, but he did not sleep. Something that had happened on the other side of the corridor had set off the Domes. And of all the invalids, only Franelli had shown enough energy to wander about. Also, Franelli had the captain's blowtorch, and a passion for using it.

He thought that over, then got up and went down the corridor again. Franelli was sitting up in bed, trying to give himself another shave, which he obviously didn't need. The thing was becoming an obsession with him, and Alfven pushed him back into place, turned on a sleeping ray, and took away the blowtorch.

THERE was no more screaming in the night, but when morning arrived, Alfven directed the captain's blowtorch at one of the Domes. A yell

immediately burst forth from its lips, and its arms began to move convulsively. At the same time, the muscles around the lips began to quiver in the same way as when the creature scented food.

Hurley and others were running toward him. Alfven turned to meet them, saw the angry looks on their faces.

"I've learned what makes them scream, sir," he said hurriedly.

"I can hear that you have. What is it?"

"I found Franelli using your blaster yesterday. He's rather shaky, and did not adjust it properly. That's why it's a little out of tune. And sometimes he didn't direct it straight at his face. I think he managed to hit the Domes with a few accidental blasts. That's what set them to screaming."

"And the wave-lengths we use for shaving have an effect on the internal digestive organs in their heads?"

"That's what I think, sir."

"Pleasant or painful?"

"I think both, sir. They laugh and try to get away at the same time."

"That doesn't make sense."

"Perhaps not, sir. But have you ever been tickled, sir?"

Hurley said thoughtfully, "I see what you mean. What do you suggest, Alfven?"

"That we set our blowtorches for distance, Captain, and use them as mass weapons. They're not at all deadly, and they won't arouse the resentment of a whole planetful of Domes. But they should be very effective."

Later, he discovered that they were. Once a Dome had tasted the effect of a blowtorch, he wanted no more of it, and ran as fast as his slender legs would take him. For the first time in weeks, Hurley smiled.

"It's more blessed to give than to receive," he said. "Let's give it to them, boys."

Alfven's eyes narrowed thoughtfully in his boyish face. "You have an idea there, Captain Hurley."

"I should say I have. Look at them run!"

After that, the news spread, and the number of attackers fell off. On the fourth day, there were none at all. On the fifth, they lined up the captive Domes, gave them a good taste of vibrations, and sent them running wildly out into freedom.

From then on, Alfven was able to work at his materializer without the previous sense of impending doom. Now they were sure that they would live until Christmas—at least that most of them would live, and there was a good chance even for the more severely injured among the invalids.

Contact kept sending turkeys which it managed to squeeze into a crowded materialization schedule, and soon they had enough for two Christmas dinners. The one on Christmas Eve wasn't bad, but none the less, the celebration was rather tame. Contact had been inspired enough to try to send a couple of bottles of ethanolic stimulant, but these had broken in transit, and their contents spilled somewhere over a distance of a hundred light years.

The invalids remained with the expedition, almost as sick as before, while homesickness tore both at them and at the men who still managed to go about their duties. They had won a reprieve, but they were still doomed. It was the glummest holiday celebration that Alfven or the captain had ever known. Some of the men didn't even make a pretense that they had enjoyed it, and went to bed early. Alfven was the last one to remain up.

In the morning, Captain Hurley had what began as a dream. He dreamed that he was back on the farm where he had spent his childhood, and that he was being awakened by the crowing of a rooster. When he started up, the dream turned into a hallucination. The rooster was standing on his stomach, crowing right into his face.

He threw off the covers and the rooster with them, and was just about to lift himself from the pillow when a hearty voice roared in his ears.

"Get out of bed, you pot-bellied spacewart, before I dump you out! A fine sample of a ship captain you are!"

Hurley leaped, hit the floor, and bounced forward. "Clara!"

"It's me, all right," said Mrs. Hurley, as he grabbed her and gave her a squeeze that would have cracked the bones of any other woman. "But I've taken a look at that sheepish hangdog face of yours, and by Pluto, I wonder if what I see is my husband."

"I'll prove my identity," beamed Hurley. "You can take my fingerprints. . . . So they finally sent a space ship."

"Space ship, your foot," said Clara, speaking with all the freedom of a skipper who had never taken a course in Politeness. "That young fellow you've got working for you brought me over a lot quicker than that."

Hurley turned toward the doorway and saw Alfven standing there, smiling, but obviously tired and sleepy. "That's right, sir," agreed Alfven. "I used the materializer."

Captain Hurley blanched. "But I saw what happened to those turkeys! And they were dead to start with, Clara, you might have—you're strong, but you might have been twisted into—"

"No danger, sir," said Alfven. "I wouldn't take the chance of getting you angry by killing your wife. I made perfectly sure it would be safe before asking Contact to get in touch with Mrs. Hurley and see if she'd want to be transported here."

"You worked on it all last night?"

"Last night was merely the climax, sir. I've been working at improving the materializer for almost a month now—ever since you made that remark about it being more blessed to give than to receive."

"I made that remark?"

"It was when we gave the Domes a touch of our blowtorches. And then it suddenly struck me that was what was wrong with our materializers. We received, but we didn't give."

"Am I stupid, or is it just that you don't know how to explain things?"

Clara laughed uproariously. "Why don't you come right out and admit it, son? You think we're all stupid."

"Not all, ma'am. It's simply that you lack scientific training. You see, when we were merely receiving, there was a one-way transmission of a high material-current density through space. Slight distortions mounted up and badly twisted everything from turkeys to spare parts. But when we gave things back to Contact, we sent a strong material-current in the other direction. In other words, we balanced a strong positive current with a strong negative one."

"I get it. When Contact sent you a new part, you returned an old one at the same time. You worked the materialization both ways."

"Exactly, sir. First I built up a return materializer with special parts I asked Contact to send, and then I started experimenting. I had a little trouble the first two weeks, but then things began to work well."

"It was almost like transforming the bad part at this end into a good one, and the good part at Contact into a bad one," Hurley said.

"A little oversimplified, sir, but the general idea is correct. After I had acquired some experience with inanimate objects, I went on to small animate ones. Several of our turkeys came over alive."

"I didn't know that."

"I meant it to be a surprise, sir, and refrigerated them as soon as they arrived. Last night, however, when I knew that things were working perfectly, I started to materialize things in earnest. First I brought over that rooster, merely as a test run, to be sure that my apparatus was in perfect order. I shipped a specimen of native fauna back to balance. When I saw that things were going well, I had Contact materialize Mrs. Hurley."

"He sent an invalid back to balance me," said Clara.

Alfven nodded. "We'll need psych experts, physicians, and possibly other assistants. We can send the most badly injured back to balance them. And for those men who are going to remain here, we can bring their wives over too."

"Son," said Captain Hurley, "I

thought at first that you were one of those impractical young squirts who know formulas and nothing else. I take that thought back. You're a genius."

Alfven didn't deny it. He merely blushed and said, "Thank you, sir."

"Young and foolish sometimes, but a genius none the less," said the captain. "You deserve a reward."

"No, sir, in this case I think that virtue, so to speak, is its own reward."

"You don't even want to go back for a vacation on Earth?"

"Not at all. From now on, Captain, I think I'm going to enjoy it here." And then, to the captain's surprise, a new face appeared in the doorway. It was a young girl, a *very* young girl in the captain's eyes, and a pretty one by his or any man's standards. She was flushing prettily as Alfven said, "This is Ellen, sir. Mrs. Hurley has already made her acquaintance."

"Huh?" exclaimed the captain brightly.

"They want to get married," said Clara. "You ought to be able to understand that, you old space-bum. They've brought a license, and it'll be perfectly legal. Legal, but funny. They're going to have *you* perform the ceremony."

Hurley gulped. "Of course I'll do it. With pleasure. But I'm kind of overwhelmed, young fellow. I never suspected—"

"I don't like to talk about my own affairs, sir. Politeness rather forbids it. But you didn't think I could go on experimenting night after night and losing sleep without an incentive, did you, sir?"

"You've got one of the nicest incentives I've ever seen. But I'm surprised. I thought you just loved science—"

CLARA nudged him, and he stopped. There was nothing scientific in the look young Alfven was giving his Incentive. And suddenly it struck Captain Hurley that a great many things were going to materialize on this planet, including a young generation that would get here without benefit of the ingenious apparatus that had brought his wife.

"We have a few things to talk over, my good man," Clara said. "Let's leave these young people alone."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Alfven respectfully. "I've already sent a message of thanks to Santa Claus—that is, Home Contact. And I've received a return message. It says simply, 'You're Welcome. Merry Christmas.' "

"That's the spirit. Merry Christmas!" said Hurley, and walked off with his gift.

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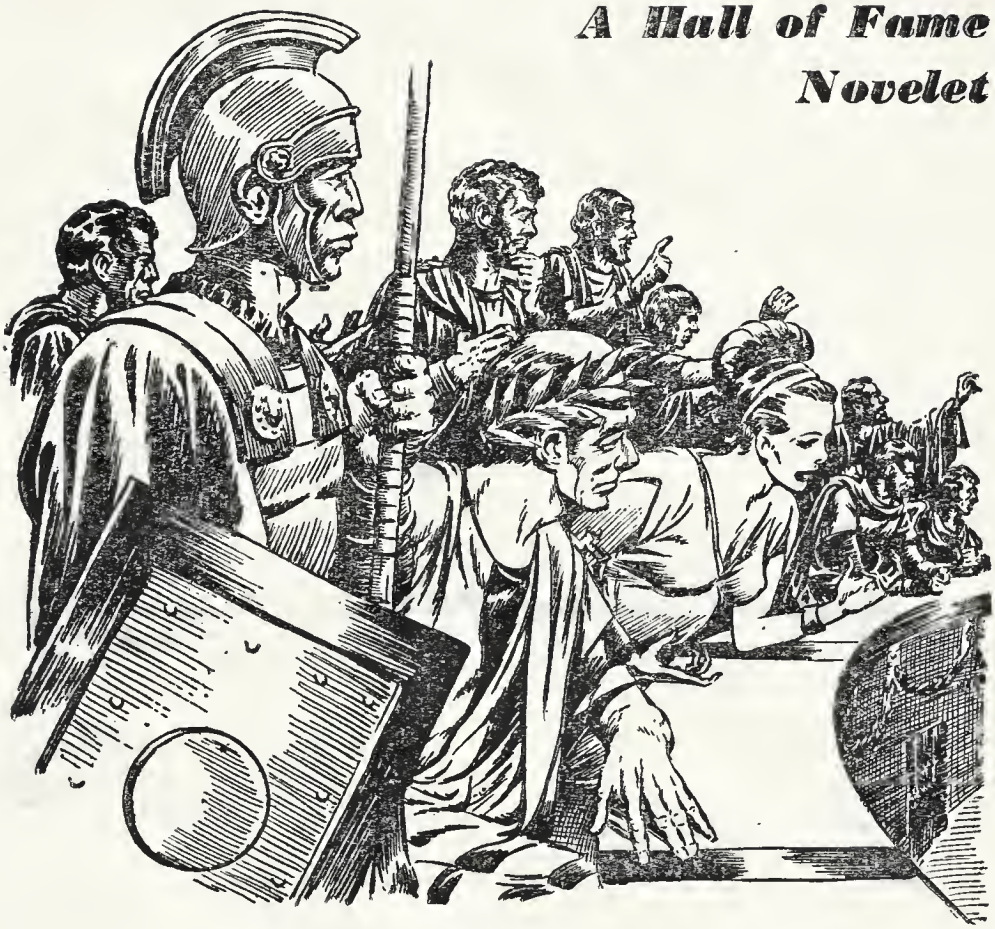

CHAPTER I

Rome Haul

PETE MANX was nervous. Spieling before a sideshow or working the shell game on some sucker he'd have felt at home. But the apparatus in Dr. Mayhem's laboratory bothered him. Power cables, massive insulators, tubes, coils—huh-*uh!* Ever since Pete's brother-in-law had taken the hot squat in Joliet Pete himself had developed a definite allergy to electricity.

He tipped his derby back on his bullet head, squinting at Mayhem.

"Now look," he said. "I know my rights. I ain't no guinea pig. For a hundred bucks I'll do a lot but—"

"Shush," frowned the doctor. "You won't be hurt. Just wait here, Mr. Manx, till I give the word."

Mayhem's agile wizened figured disappeared behind a curtain. A spatter of applause greeted him as he appeared on an improvised rostrum in a screened-off portion of his laboratory.

Pete tiptoed to the curtain and parted

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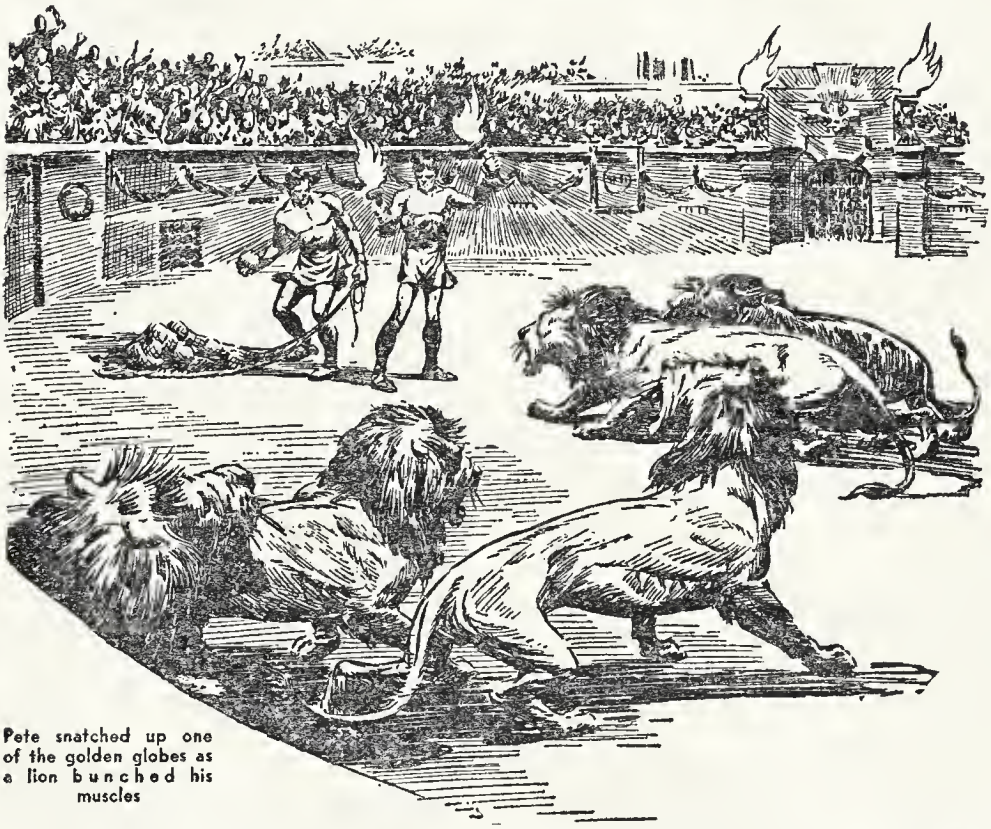
ROMAN HOLIDAY

by KELVIN KENT

When time-trotter Pete Manx goes to Rome, he makes the Romans do as he does for a change!



Pete snatched up one of the golden globes as a lion bunched his muscles

it. He glimpsed a dozen young men—college kids—and a large, amorphous gentleman who wore with dignity pince-nez and a who-the-devil-are-you air.

"Nasty looking customer," Pete told himself. "Wonder what this is all about? The doc wouldn't give me a hundred fish for nothing."

Mayhem commenced to talk.

"Gentlemen, I regret keeping you waiting. I invited you here to witness a little experiment. Professor Aker"—he

bowed with a faintly ironic leer to the man with the pince-nez—"has honored me by disagreeing with a certain theory I postulated. He maintains that you and I, gentlemen, are—um—cogs."

Pete grinned as he saw the large gentlemen bristle, then rise.

"Dr. Mayhem," rumbled Professor Aker, "I am at a loss to know why I was summoned to your laboratory. But now that I am here I feel that it would be expedient to explain my premise."

"Here we go again," whispered an irreverent freshman. Professor Aker had, in the university, a definite reputation as a bore.

"Ahem," said the professor. "It was my contention that our present-day civilization is such a complex organization, with each individual so dependent upon many other individuals for existence, that a man today receives no practical education whatsover. He is, as I said, merely a cog. In other words he knows only a limited phase of whatever trade or profession he follows."

"And," prodded Mayhem, "you said that if a modern man were suddenly transported back to ancient Rome, for instance—"

"Ah, yes—yes. Despite his apparent advantage of centuries of knowledge, he would be utterly helpless. He would starve for want of ability to make something useful. An office worker—what could he do? Nothing. Could an automobile worker who spends his days bolting on fenders support himself in Rome?

"Or take an ordinary jeweler. Could he make the parts of the watches he repairs every day? Of course not! He couldn't build a clock to save his soul! I contend that the only type of man with any chance of making a financial success, if cast back into the past, is the man of science. Science alone can defeat adverse environment."

MAYHEM chuckled unpleasantly.

"So you say repeatedly. But if you really could go back to Roman times I wonder if you would still feel the same?"

Aker drew himself up.

"My dear Mayhem, I would revolutionize Roman standards of living, change the course of history by the simple introduction of cheap power—electricity. The history of civilization is, of course, the history of transportation. By introducing electricity and motors I could—"

"Yes, yes. Familiar ground, Professor Aker. But you are soon to have a chance to put your theory to the test. I've built a time machine," said Mayhem with the simplicity of true genius.

"No, don't argue. It's never been done before, I know. But then there's never been a Horatio Mayhem before. I can project you back into the past time, and unless you want to back down, I can send you temporarily to the days of ancient Rome."

"You are mad," Aker decided.

"Suit yourself. But I'd like to make a small wager. I need a few thousand dollars' worth of new equipment for my research."

Aker reacted as department heads have reacted immemorially to such suggestions.

"Outrageous! I have already told you I would not countenance such wanton expenditure."

"So," Mayhem spoke persuasively, "I'll bet with you. I'll send you and another man—an ordinary layman—back to Rome and give you a certain period in which to prove your theory. If my man makes a bigger success than you, then you'll give me the equipment I want."

Aker purpled.

"*What!* Do you seriously—"

"Afraid?" taunted Mayhem.

Pete Manx, still watching surreptitiously, chuckled. Mayhem had maneuvered Aker behind the eight ball. With all those school kids making wise remarks and daring the old bloat to go through with his argument Aker, pompous and sensitive, didn't dare back down.

Aker glared around. "Afraid? *Bah!*" he growled. "Of course not!" He sank down into his chair.

"Then you agree," Mayhem smiled.

"Good! You may come out now, Mr. Manx!"

Manx appeared from behind the curtain, waving a hand agreeably at the group.

"Hiya," he grinned cheerfully. "Just call me Pete."

"Who is this person?" Aker demanded.

"Gentleman I hired at the beach—a barker at one of the concessions, in fact. His chief virtues are a certain native shrewdness and a knowledge of Latin, a knowledge he shares with you, Professor. Naturally, when you go back to Rome it is necessary to speak the Roman tongue."

"This—er—fellow speaks Latin?" Aker said dubiously.

"And why not?" came back Pete belligerently. "My old lady was a teacher in high school. Listen. *Omnia Gallia divisa est—*"

"Not now," Mayhem interposed hastily. "But soon perhaps. Now, the arrangement is clear, I trust. Professor Aker and Pete Manx will go back to Rome in my time machine and will be given a certain period in which to achieve success. And if my man wins Professor Aker will give me my equipment."

"Look here, Mayhem," Aker said uneasily. "This is poppycock. I'm getting out of here right now!"

"You are indeed," said the doctor. "Oh my, yes! I took the precaution of wiring your chair so that it is a miniature time machine." He pressed a button. "Er—good luck, Professor.

He was, however, addressing what seemed to be a peculiarly repulsive looking corpse. For Professor Aker's ample body had suddenly slumped in the chair, an expression of utter vacuity frozen on the beefy features.

"Don't be alarmed," the doctor called, his hands raised to quiet the audience. "He isn't harmed. It's merely a trance. His mind has been projected back in time."

"Hey, wait!" Pete Manx gulped. "That looks like the hot seat to me!"

"Pete, my boy, it's quite all right."

SOME stories are forgotten almost as soon as they are printed. Others stand the test of time.

Because "Roman Holiday," by Kelvin Kent, has stood this test, it has been nominated for SCIENTIFICTION'S HALL OF FAME and is reprinted here.

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Dr. Mayhem smiled. "Just sit here if you please."

Pete squirmed.

Bang!

The inner consciousness of Pete Manx left his body, derby, checkered vest, and orange tie, to appear with startling abruptness in another time sector. Pete went, however, in an erratic sort of way, much like a pendulum gathering momentum and swinging back and forth between ancient Rome and modern America.

The laboratory suddenly had vanished. Sunlight glared down on him instead. Yelling tradesmen stormed and chaffered. Tides of laden slaves surged among the booths of vegetable sellers and money changers.

Then—

He was back in the laboratory—paralyzed! Unable to stir a muscle, wink an eyelash or bridge a synapse, Pete stared blankly and listened to Dr. Mayhem speaking.

"Time like space is curved, revolving around a central time-consciousness. There the temporal sense of all men from the beginning to the end of things has its origin. We, gentlemen, are on the rim of the wheel so to speak. If we could project ourselves to the hub and out again along another spoke we would find ourselves in a different time."

Swish!

Rome! A horseman pacing slowly

along a narrow street, preceded by a gilded litter borne by slaves. Cries of *"Cave! Cave!"* Rough fluent oaths of a bearded Gaul looming up near by.

Back again to the laboratory—Dr. Mayhem was still lecturing.

"They have both been mentally transported while their bodies lie here in a state of trance—into the minds of two persons in the days of Rome's glory. Their consciousnesses were projected into the Time-center, thence out again to a period known to us only as history. . . ."

CHAPTER II

"Clavus Pila"

PETE MANX went back to Rome and this time stayed there. Once more the hot Italian sunlight blazed down upon him. Odors of wine and olives and spices were strong in his nostrils. For a moment the world swung dizzily about him.

Then suddenly something came violently in contact with his nose and he was precipitated full-length upon the Appian Way.

"Earthquake!" he gasped. "I ain't in Rome. I'm in California!"

A harsh voice spoke swift Latin words, and Pete recognized them. He sat up, feeling an odd awkwardness about his new body, and stared at a furry-bearded soldier who was shaking both fists and cursing.

"Purse-snatcher," the soldier roared among other things and expressed an intention of tearing Pete apart and scattering his revolting body from Viminal Hill to the Colosseum. "An honest soldier cannot be in Rome a day before some thief lifts his purse. What is thy name, dog?"

"Petus Manxus," replied Pete.

"Then arise, Manxus, the thief, that I may smite you again."

This struck Pete as unsound advice but he stood up nevertheless. A quick glance downward told him that he was dressed in a billowing white tunic like a nightgown. His feet, sandal-shod, were invisible to him. Apparently Pete's mind was inhabiting the body of some Roman who had just got himself into a peck of trouble.

Pete desperately fended for himself with jujutsu. His triumph was instantaneous. A twist of the wrist sent the Gaul spinning, whereupon Petus Manxus' two hundred and fifty pounds lit upon him in a running broad jump.

The unfortunate soldier did not get up again, remaining flat on his back, twitching and wheezing. Pete fled down the Via Appia until he was protected by a surging multitude of Gauls, Scythians, Britons—a potpourri of the world. Unobserved, he withdrew into a vacant space behind a wine-seller's booth and sat down to rest and pant.

"So this is Rome," he muttered disparagingly. "Pew! Science is sure a funny thing."

But he had a job to do, and a rough-and-ready philosophy that softened life's knocks. So he carefully took stock of his possessions. They were not many. Under his tunic he wore a woolen undergarment that itched, and a leather pouch. In the pouch was a purse containing three lonely pieces of silver and a knife.

Pete grunted. If he had been a thief up to now, he'd certainly been an unsuccessful one. He would have to start from scratch and the only thing in his favor in this friendless world was the fact that there seemed to be hordes of suckers just begging to be plucked.

Wandering back into the busy square, Pete came at last to a vacant booth. In it was a sloping wooden table which had a two-inch curb all around. An idea glimmered into his brain.

He had no tools save the knife in his pouch. But with this he set to work, humming under his breath, "Hold that Ti-ber! Hold that Tiber!" Carefully he marked off the slanting surface of the table with a pattern of ten dots. At each dot he painfully gouged a shallow depression in the soft wood.

Then he whittled a number of tiny

pegs and, below each depression, bored small holes into which he fitted the pegs. Above some of them he also distributed an occasional peg. On the right side of the board, paralleling the curb, he fitted another narrow wooden strip so that a channel extending almost to the top was formed.

At the top, curving from side to side, he pegged in a semi-circular strip of stiff reed. Finally, at the base of the right-hand channel, he arranged a painfully-carved wooden plunger. He stepped back to survey his work.

"Crude," he sighed, "but good enough for a beginning." A gnawing in his middle was making itself felt. He was hungry. Hastily he went forth, surveying the Via Appia till he found three urchins playing marbles in a dusty corner. He traded his knife for the marbles.

Then he was ready. Petus Manxus returned to his booth, a cold feeling of excitement making him shiver a bit. He made an involuntary gesture to shove his derby further back on his head. He winced as plump fingers encountered a bald pink dome.

Two soldiers were passing. Pete called to them. "Hey, you two! Want to see something new? C'mere."

The men approached. "Well?"

"The Emperor's latest amusement—" Was there an emperor? Apparently so, for the soldiers bent to examine the board with interest. "You, there! With the purple nightshirt! Come and see!"

Three men in purple togas frowningly approached. Attracted by the senators others followed.

THIS was familiar stuff to Pete. He launched glibly forth into his spiel.

"Friends, Romans, countrymen!" he yelled. "Lend me your ears! I come here not to sell you something, but to fascinate and amuse you! Come see the Emperor's favorite game!"

"What is it called?" a paunchy senator took the bait.

"*Clavus pila!* Pinball! Rich prizes to the skilful! This is not a game of chance, my friends, but a test of skill and skill alone. Step right up, folks, and keep your eye on the ball!"

The crowd surged up. Pete casually dropped one marble in the channel along the right side of the board, drew back the plunger, slammed it forward again. The ball shot up, followed the curving strip of stout reed, caromed off a nail and began dribbling slowly down the board, bounding off pegs, zigzagging, and eventually dropping into one of the holes.

"A Vestal Virgin!" Pete bellowed, and the onlookers noticed that each hole was labeled with a name. Six were Vestal Virgins—three were Senators—the one at the top was dubbed Caesar.

"It's easy, folks! A Caesar, two Senators and five Virgins wins you two sesterces. If you hit Caesar, three Senators and all the Vestal Virgins you can take the board home with you. Come one, come all!"

With uncanny accuracy Manxus poured four more marbles into the guide slot and fired, registering Caesar, two Senators and one Out at the bottom of the board. In a trice the crowd was begging him to take their money, eager for a chance to play.

Pete took them one at a time, charging one sesterce per game, picking up marbles out of their resting places by hand after each game was finished. By a stroke of good fortune the first two players each won a little. From then on there was no stopping the mob. By nightfall Manxus' pouch and both hands were stuffed with coins.

Smelly inefficient oil lamps were brought out but Pete vetoed further play that day. Somewhere in Rome there was a place that his body called home but he naturally didn't know where it was. Instead he took a room at an inn—the Caupona Bacchus, B. Bibulus, Proprietor—which reminded him in appearance and odor of any other beer joint back home with dollar-a-day rooms upstairs. But Pete didn't mind. He was already well on the road to becoming the slot-machine czar of Rome!

Next day he set up his outfit in the square at dawn. By making it a bit easier to win he had customers lined up

all the way around the square waiting to play *clavus pila*. By eleven o'clock he had broken a carpenter, who was so afraid to return home to his wife that Pete returned his money. The grateful carpenter gladly promised to build a dozen *clavus pila* boards of finest materials and deliver them to Pete's place at the inn.

By two o'clock a tax collector had gone down swinging, losing in addition to his own money, two hundred denarii belonging to the government.

Eventually innkeeper Bibulus was seduced by the insidious sight of a praetorian guardsman raking in his winnings. He came, played and was conquered. Petus Manxus went home that evening with a partnership in the Caupona Bacchus.

Thenceforward the *clavus pila* rage rushed ahead on its own momentum. Pete set up the new tables in the inn, a dozen of them, and had Bibulus and his three fat daughters help regulate the play, take in the coins, watch the chiselers who tried to start their game over again while no one was looking—and put down a stern foot when anyone was caught tilting the boards.

Within a week Pete was riding the streets in a sumptuous litter, wearing fur togas and following a retinue of twenty slaves. All over Rome his *clavus pila* parlors were springing up like mushrooms.

Pete was smart. The more parlors he opened, the larger his income. The more money he made, the more he could afford to lower the odds so everyone could win occasionally, working on a smaller percentage. And the more people won, the more they poured sesterces into the Manxus coffers.

"It's a vicious coicle," Pete grinned to Bibulus. "They actually beg me to take their dough!"

It was inevitable that Petus Manxus should look around for more worlds to conquer. He considered the idea of inventing roulette or tango but vetoed it. That would require opening a new set of joints and since he had all the gambling element playing pinball the new games would just take some of the players from one racket to the other with no increase in intake. He looked into the theater situation briefly but gave that up when he learned Rome had but two or three theaters and they were the Emperor's own graft.

"Such a pity," Pete moaned cheerfully to the bewildered Bibulus. "What a pushover they woulda been for Bingo and Bank Nite!"

But politics—*there* was something in which Pete's experience would serve him well!

PETE scurried around among the influential Romans who were somewhat under obligation to him because of *clavus pila* losses and put on gentle pressure. He talked earnestly to the head of the flute-blowers' guild, to his friend the carpenter, to many others. And one week before election day the moon rose on a Rome gone politically insane.

Rome was having her first political parade under the auspices of Petus Manxus.

Leading the way, blowing and plucking away with all their might, was a weird orchestra. The instruments were flutes, lyres and horns. Next came a group of Pete's intimates. Each carried a square poster, upthrust on a pole, which bobbed and twirled in the smoky light of torches and lamps.

"Manxus for Magistrate!" they proclaimed in large letters. "A New Deal for Romans!"

"Vote for Manxus, Old-line Republican! Bring Back Prosperity!"

"Seventy Sesterces Every Saturday for Each Citizen Over Sixty!"

This was followed by a gorgeously-decorated litter, carried by eight handsome slaves. Standing up inside, bowing and smiling to the crowd, was Pete. Behind came about a hundred paid retainers, all cheering mightily at the rate of one denarius per hour.

So, after a whirlwind campaign in which he advocated the Townsendum old-age retirement plan, conservatism, liberalism and other incomprehensibles, Petus Manxus was returned magistrate

with the assistance of some sleight-of-hand at the polls. With Bibulus as chief adviser, Pete devoted himself to administering his office.

Things ran smoothly—too smoothly, according to Bibulus.

"The Emperor hasn't even asked you to make a will in his favor!" he worried. "Strange."

"So that's how he gets his rake-off eh?" Pete asked. "Just an old Roman custom. Y'know, I haven't even seen Claudius yet."

"Few do," Bibulus observed meaningly, "and most of them regret it. The Emperor's favor is dangerous to lose. Just the same there's something strange about it. Are you sure you haven't a powerful friend at court?"

"Except for my uncle who is a Tammany alderman, no."

"Yet a woman has appeared often among the spectators when you are on the bench. A beautiful woman, veiled to the eyes—"

"Women," pronounced Pete, "is poison. Ixnay, Bibby. Have you got any news about the guy I'm lookin' for?" Ever since Pete's election he had been searching for the trail of his inadvertent companion into time, Professor Aker, who should have been somewhere in Rome. Until today Bibulus had brought no news.

Now, however, the former caupo twisted his face into a crumpled arrangement of wrinkles intended to be a smile.

"I have learned of a wizard whose magic failed—a madman. He rushed down the Via Appia some moons ago, shouting dire prophecies—trying perhaps to start a new cult. To those who would follow him he promised chariots that would move without horses, lamps that would burn without flame and"—Bibulus bent double with laughter—"and galleys that would fly through the air like birds! Verily!"

Pete's eyes widened.

"*Zeus!* Go on!"

"He tried to make magic. He filled a pot with a liquid that burned like fire. He wound strands of wire around metal cylinders and plunged a bit of copper into the pot. Then he began to shout and call for some metal whereof no one had heard—what was it? I forget. They brought him *zingiber*—ginger. He flung it down and trod upon it. He yelled loudly for—I have it—*zinc!*"

Pete whistled.

"I see it all now," he muttered. Aker planned to build a series of simple galvanic batteries and with them power his primitive electric motors made of coils and armature. But he had forgotten one vital thing. Zinc, necessary for his battery, wasn't known until the sixteenth century! "So what happened to him?"

"No one knows. But I shall search further. And now you must hold court, Petus Manxus. Here—your toga. Many await."

CHAPTER III

The Golden Globes

UNCOMFORTABLY Pete donned the garment, arose from his cushioned bench and went into the next room. Once a dignified example of Roman architecture it had been altered somewhat under Pete's orders. A railing kept the spectators at a distance and to the left of the magister a railed-in enclosure held the prisoners.

There was a spattering of applause as Pete mounted the bench. He waved a negligent hand.

"First case," Bibulus called. Two guards marched forward, impelling between them a large handsome young man with jet-black curls and a harassed expression.

"A poisoner," whispered Bibulus, as the defendant was hustled into the dock. "He tried to slay Gaius Hostilius, the consul."

"What's his racket?" inquired Pete in his abominable Latin.

"A street magician of strange powers. He attracted the consul's attention with his tricks and performed the miracle of turning water to wine. That was all

right but Hostilius demanded that the cup be brought to him. When he drank of it, he fell down and rolled about in agony.

Just then the prisoner, who had stared incredulously at Pete when the latter's ungrammatical Latin had soiled the judicial atmosphere, began to shout in a language incomprehensible to the others.

"Manx! *Manx!* Is that you, for heaven's sake?"

"He casts a spell on us!" cried Bibulus and a guard promptly suppressed the unfortunate prisoner in no uncertain manner.

"Petus Manxus—by the gods! What ails you?"

"Zeus," gasped Pete, glaring at the defendant, "has stricken me with a thunderbolt!" Then, in English, "Hey, Prof! Is that you?"

"Manx!" squalled the young man. "Of course it's I! Get me out of this quick! I didn't poison the fellow. My—er—plans went wrong and I was supporting myself with simple chemical magic when he—"

"Sure. Sure." Pete soothed him. "I'll give it the fix." He turned to Bibulus. "We'll just dimiss the charge. It's his first offense."

"Poisoners," Bibulus frowned, "are always thrown to the lions."

Pete silenced him with a lifted hand, pronounced sentence. As he felt the people were behind him strongly he was naturally greatly surprised by the outburst which greeted his announcement that the prisoner would go free.

Rome didn't like poisoners.

"To the lions!" someone bellowed. "Flay him alive! Tear out his tongue!"

The professor seemed to shrink. Pete looked about in desperation. He met the eyes of a veiled woman who sat in a corner—watching him intently—perhaps the same one Bibulus mentioned. No help there. But there was a florid benevolent-looking old man in the front row and to him Pete turned for aid.

"Sir, will you use your influence in quieting this mob? After all, I'm sure the prisoner had no murderous intentions and maybe the consul deserved killing anyway, if what I've heard about Gaius Hostilius is true."

Bibulus clutched Pete's shoulder.

"Gods, Petus! You put your foot into it that time. That's the plaintiff, Gaius Hostilius!"

It looked like a big day. The crowd suddenly turned into a mob with the volatility of the Latin temperament. Pete caught a glimpse of the veiled woman vanishing through a curtain and saw Gaius Hostilius mounting a chair to shout, "Down with the tyrant! Is this Roman justice?"

"*No!*" roared the mob. "To the lions with both of them!"

"*My-y-y* friends," began Pete, then decided the moment unpropitious for a speech. Instead he grabbed the professor's arm and dragged him back through a curtained aperture. But the mob wasn't thwarted. They came bellowing in and Pete and Professor Aker fled for their lives. But in vain. They were finally cornered in Pete's private bath and attacked with fury.

"Bibulus!" Pete roared. "Get help!"

But Bibulus had long since decided on the better part of valor. He had discreetly vanished.

The tumult and the shouting died as a corps of guardsmen marched through the mob, swords bared. Under threat of bloodshed the crowd subsided, drawing back to wait watchfully.

"You're just in time," Pete sighed thankfully to the bronzed *legatus*. "Brother, we needed help and how!"

"Seize them," the lieutenant snapped. "Disarm those men! Petus Manxus, you and this felon are under arrest. Caesar himself will decide your fate this day!"

CLAUDIUS Drusus Germanicus, Caesar Imperator, gnawed on a mutton bone in one hand. With the other, he wrestled impotently with an ornate *clavus pila* board, tilting it this way and that as a marble bounced merrily down its length. He was a stunted, unhealthy, red-eyed person, clad in plain white garments, his fingers hidden beneath a blaze of jeweled rings. Claudius looked up as Pete and Aker entered.

"Ah," said Caesar pleasantly, shooting another marble, dropping the table and reaching for a goblet. "Malefactors. When are the next games, Cratinus?"

"They are in progress now," Cratinus said. "These men are here at the order of the Empress Messalina, Caesar. She was in the fat one's court—he's a magistrate—when the riot broke out and she summoned the Imperial Guards."

Just then a strikingly lovely brunette came through a curtained doorway.

"Here is Messalina now." Claudius beamed. "Sit beside me, my dear. We have these dogs you ordered brought before us."

The Empress sank down, her dark eyes scrutinizing the men. "And what do you intend, Claudius?"

"Feed them to the lions." Caesar solved the problem with a gesture.

Messalina frowned but said nothing. Claudius pondered for a time and suddenly laughed.

"One moment! I've an idea—one that should amuse us since this banquet is so dull. If either of these two men can prove he deserves to live he shall live and be honored. If he fails—there will be a holiday in the arena tomorrow."

The guests applauded. Caesar motioned the guards back.

"Now, you two. Show me your worth! You first, young man. What is your profession?"

Professor Aker gulped. "I am a scientist."

"What? A magician, more likely. Well, do magic for us."

The unhappy professor stared around desperately.

"I—I have no equipment."

Cratinus whispered in the Emperor's ear and Caesar looked up with a gleam in his eye. "I hear you can turn water to wine. Do so!"

"I can't," Aker confessed. "Not without certain—necessities."

"A faker," Caesar said. "As I thought. To the arena with him."

"Wait!" Aker struggled to free himself. "I can foretell the future. I'm a prophet, that's it! I can tell the future of Rome."

Claudius was interested. "Well?"

"Er—Rome shall rule the world."

"Rome *does* rule the world," Cratinus pointed out. "Every *puer* knows that."

The professor tried again. "Two thousand years hence science will rule the world. Horses will be almost extinct. Electricity—a certain invisible force of nature—will provide unlimited power."

"Our poets can do better than that," Caesar yawned. "And I like not what you say about horses. A noble animal, the horse. If these be your best prophesies—hold!" Caesar leaned forward. "If you can truly read the future, tell me how I shall meet my death!"

Silence. The guests paused with food or drink half-lifted. All eyes were on the unhappy Professor Aker.

And he, after a hasty glance at Messalina, broke into a profuse sweat and closed his eyes, shuddering. For, as every schoolboy should know, Claudius Germanicus, Caesar Imperator, was poisoned by Agrippina, his wife, after he had put aside Messalina. And to go into detail about this, Aker realized, would not only be untactful but suicidal.

Caesar grunted and turned to Petus Manxus.

"What about you? I hope you're of more worth than this idiot."

PETE took a deep breath. He said gravely, "I am worth a fortune, Caesar. Hidden in a secret place in my house is much gold—too much for a private citizen to possess. Now if you would accept this treasure as a pledge of my loyalty—"

The Emperor's eyes gleamed. The greed of Claudius was notorious in Rome. Pete felt a little wave of relief.

"We shall see," Caesar said ambiguously. "Cratinus, do you go and examine this treasure. Where is it to be found, prisoner?"

Pete gave directions, and Cratinus hurried out. Then, at a wave of the Emperor's hand, Pete and Aker were seized by the guards and pulled back against the wall, where they waited while the banquet proceeded.

The minutes dragged. Yet it was not

long before Cratinus returned. With a baleful glance at Pete he approached Caesar and began whispering hurriedly into the Emperor's ear. Claudius sat erect with a jerk. He turned to glare at the prisoners.

"It is not wise to attempt trickery upon Caesar," he said at last in a dangerously low voice. "Cratinus, speak out. Let us all hear of this deception."

Nothing loath, Cratinus announced, "I found the treasure chest where Petus Manxus said it was, filled to the brim with spherical golden ingots. Apparently there was a fortune before me. But I have dealt with thieves before and I tested one of the ingots. It was of pottery —baked clay—with a shell of gold about it to conceal the deception. All were alike. Almost worthless!"

Caesar's face was bleak and cold. "Take those men away. Tomorrow we shall watch the lions feed."

Pete spent an unhappy night in the dungeon beneath the Colosseum. He was, he admitted, in a tight spot. And there seemed no possible means of escaping Caesar's vengeance. Pete tossed for hours upon his straw pallet but arrived at no solution to the problem. Certainly Professor Aker couldn't help. He had been dragged off, shouting, to some other dungeon.

At last a guard opened the door. He seized Pete's arm and with the point of a short sword urged his unwilling prisoner along a corridor, through a metal grating that swung back on creaking hinges and into the arena.

Blinding sunlight blazed up from yellow sand with which the floor of the Colosseum was carpeted. From the spectators—an avid multitude of them, blood-hungry, impatient—came a thunderous bellow. They had been waiting for hours, some of them, and this was the first event of the day's games.

Petus was urged toward a box above which a purple canopy hung. He looked up to meet the malevolent stare of Claudius, who sat surrounded by high nobles of the court, Messalina at his side. The Empress' face was immobile until she saw Petus. Then she leaned toward Caesar and whispered something to the Emperor. Claudius nodded, smiling unpleasantly.

Just then the guards dragged up a shrinking figure. It was Professor Aker. His knees were wobbling and his eyes were bloodshot and wild.

Caesar leaned forward. His voice rang loud in the great Colosseum's arena.

"Petus Manxus, in a moment you and your companion will be alone with the lions. It is our custom to allow prisoners in the arena a short sword with which to defend themselves but Messalina has suggested a more interesting weapon.

"Both of you will be given torches—lighted torches to keep the lions at bay. As long as the torches burn you will live, perhaps. If you are sufficiently skilful." Claudius' face was alight with malice and cruelty.

"Now as to this gift of yours, Petus Manxus—these golden globes from your treasure chest. You have asked for them. You shall have them. So—" The Emperor waved his hand. Immediately guards hurried forward, each of them bearing two of the golden spheres. Before Pete could move he was seized and hurled to the ground.

CHAPTER IV

Petus Manxus, Consul

CORDS were tied tightly about his ankles. To the ropes a net was attached and the guards swiftly filled it with the globes. There was a flurry of well-disciplined action. The soldiers marched away, and a door clanged. Pete struggled upright.

A convict with ball and chain! Pete's ankles were firmly attached to the net filled with the heavy globes. He took a step forward, stumbled, and fell flat on his face.

There was a rattling of metal. A low distant growling grew louder. The murmurs of the audience grew to a bellowing shout.

"*Leones*—the lions!"

Pete heard a strangled gasp. Through sand-blinded eyes he saw Aker staring, jaw agape, at the far end of the arena. In nerveless hands the professor held two short torches.

Just then a bright object sailed glittering through the air and dropped at Pete's feet. It was a knife, thrown to him by Bibulus. He snatched it up.

"*Professor!*" he yelled. "Hold on! Don't drop those torches!" Swiftly Pete bent, slashed the cords that bound his feet, sprang to the netful of glittering globes.

But the lions were in the arena now and they scented prey. A dozen of the tawny lithe beasts came pouring up the runway, tails lashing, manes tossing in the sunlight. An angry roar came as a lean dark-coated lioness shot forward like a thunderbolt, her tail erect.

Caesar leaned forward, moistening his lips with his tongue. Messalina sat motionless, her eyes fixed on the tableau beneath her.

But Pete was almost ready. A few slashes with the knife had parted the cords of the net, and the golden globes rolled free on the sands. Pete snatched up one and turned just as the lioness bunched her muscles a dozen feet from Aker and—sprang!

The paralyzed professor couldn't move a muscle. He stood waiting for the hungry carnivore to smash him down to the ground, his face paper-white, still gripping the flaming torches in fear-tightened fingers.

Pete seized the torches, thrust the professor aside with a hasty shove and drove the burning brands out in a swift stabbing motion.

The lioness tried to turn in midair. She failed and one of the torches ground into her muzzle. She screamed, snapped at the flames, suddenly turned to race away, shaking her head in agony. She was out of the battle for a while at least, Pete realized. But the other lions were coming—and coming fast.

Pete still held a golden sphere under his arm. He bent his head, gripped a bit of whitish string in his teeth and pulled. A few more inches of string were drawn out. Pete lit it with the torch, hefted the globe in his hand and hurled it at the approaching lions.

The glittering sphere sailed through the air, fell under the nose of a carnivore and rolled a few feet. The string was sputtering slightly, an almost invisible bluish flame arising from it. One of the lions batted at the thing with an angry paw—

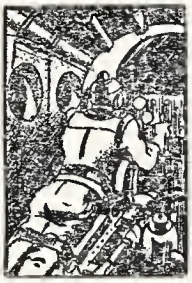
And then hell broke loose in the Colosseum! With a thunderous earthshaking roar a holocaust of deafening fiery madness blasted out, scattering fragments of bloody lion-meat upon the horrified spectators. Caesar fell back in his gilded seat. The remaining lions stared, aghast, then fled.

Pete laughed in an unsteady voice.

"Hey, professor!" he called. "Grab some bombs for yourself!"

Aker scarcely seemed to hear. He swiveled to look at the pile of golden

NEXT ISSUE'S HALL OF FAME SELECTION



Dr. Seabrook was willing to sacrifice the greatest intellect ever known to man — to save the Universe from the Lubian scourge!

MEN MUST DIE

A Memorable Novelet

By WARD HAWKINS

globes. His lips formed the word, "Gunpowder! Bombs!"

Caesar sprang up. "Open the gates!" he shouted. "Turn loose the beasts—all of them! Slay me these demons!"

Frightened guards leaped to obey. The clanging of metal sounded. From the distance came a heavy thumping and confused sounds of roaring, caterwauling and trumpeting.

"Take a torch," Pete snapped, thrusting one of them in Aker's hands. "Here they come!" He considered hurling a bomb at Claudius but the sudden advent of a score of leopards distracted his attention. He blew the great cats into bits with a well-placed overhand throw.

Aker had come to life and was doing his share as the runways disgorged beasts into the arena. Gasping, he threw a question at his companion.

"How—how did you make these?"

"Always knew how," Pete clipped, lighting a bomb. "Used to make fireworks in a medicine show. Sulphur, charcoal and saltpeter. Burned willow for the charcoal. Got the sulphur from the volcano—what's its name—Vesuvius. Bribed a lieutenant to bring me saltpeter from Arabia. He didn't know what it was—but I'd seen the stuff in Chile and told him what to look for. Get that tiger!"

Aker hastily lit and threw another bomb. The tiger disintegrated. Pete kept on talking swiftly, jerkily.

"Always get ready for trouble—that's my motto. I figgered I'd get the jump on these Romans if anything went haywire. So I fooled around till I got the right mixture for gunpowder and then loaded a lot of pots with it and put in shrapnel—all the scrap metal I could find."

THEN came an elephant. It got uncomfortably close but an exploding bomb disrupted the creature's nervous system and it went trumpeting and thundering around the arena, causing additional confusion and adding to the bedlam.

Pete clipped out, "And I gilded the bombs just in case. Figured they'd look harmless then—just big round gold ingots. If I got in a tight spot I could always offer to buy my way out, and when I got my hands on the bombs—well!"

Aker shouted, "Manx! *Look!*"

Pete whirled—and stood staring. Danger from the animals was past. The few that remained alive had fled, or were cowering against the walls of the arena. But directly under the royal box was the wounded elephant, trunk waving, tiny eyes blazing, trumpeting in rage. He was—mad! The tumult in the box must have attracted his attention and he was charging the massive stonework wall with titanic jolting blows, while above him men fought and screamed and sprang to escape.

Caesar himself, attempting to flee, stumbled against Messalina and Pete had a confused idea that the Empress had hurled Claudius down and overturned the gilded throne upon the squirming Roman. That done Messalina hurriedly left.

"Hold everything!" Pete called to Aker. "I got an idea."

The wall was already buckling. Masonry cracked and groaned under the onslaught of the great elephant. Pete lit a bomb, gauged his distance carefully and threw it. The resultant explosion made the elephant whirl, trumpeting, his piggish eyes searching the arena.

He saw Pete. He started forward.

Pete threw three bombs. If they failed he was lost. He had but one left.

But the home-made gunpowder-and-shrapnel did the trick. The elephant died in a thunderous roar of tearing, blinding explosion.

A little silence fell upon the arena. The beasts were slain. The mob, realizing this, paused tentatively, ready to renew their flight. Pete gripped his last remaining bomb, stepped forward and waited for Claudius to crawl to his feet.

The Emperor of Rome was a wreck. He shot a horrified glance into the arena and started to run. A shout from Pete stopped him.

"Hold! Halt, Caesar!"

Claudius froze. He glared down, shuddering. Pete lifted the bomb menacingly.

"I have destroyed your beasts," he called, "and I can ruin Rome as easily."

Claudius gave a terrified squeak. Messalina suddenly appeared, hurried to the Emperor's side and whispered to him. Caesar seemed to grasp new hope.

"Petus Manxus!" he called, his voice unsteady. "Do not use your magic! You are pardoned! More—I make you a consul of Imperial Rome."

* * * * *

Pete Manx opened dazed eyes, stared blankly at a face that seemed oddly familiar. For a second he thought the bomb had exploded after all. Then, quite suddenly, he recognized Dr. Mayhem. The Doc! And all around were the wires and gadgets of the Doc's laboratory. Rome had vanished—Caesar, Messalina, the Colosseum, all the rest.

"Oh, my head!" Pete moaned rising unsteadily. "I feel like I been through a knothole. Lemme feel you, Doc, an' see if you're real."

Mayhem chuckled.

"It's real enough, Manx. You're back home unharmed as I promised." He turned as a hoarse groan sounded. "Ho, here's Professor Aker. He awoke a bit before you did."

Pete noticed the laboratory was deserted save for the three of them. Aker was swallowing convulsively.

"Let me out of here," he gasped. "Mayhem, I—I—" He turned a virulent green and staggered toward the door.

"Just a moment," Mayhem called. "Do I get that equipment?"

Aker hesitated. "You gave your word," Mayhem reminded. "It was a bet. And in Rome you discovered how necessary the right equipment is. Besides, how would you like the students to learn of your—um—activities as a poisoner?"

"It's blackmail," Aker cried. He looked at Pete, grimaced and threw up his hands. "All right. You get your equipment. I hope it chokes you, Mayhem."

The professor departed hastily, leaving Mayhem chuckling quietly.

"Here's your hundred dollars and a hundred extra for winning out. Thank you!"

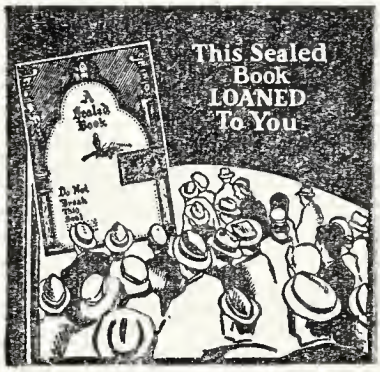
Pete counted the money carefully, then looked sideways at Dr. Mayhem.

"Uh—I was wondering about what you just said to the professor, Doc. How'd you know so much about what happened in Rome, anyway?"

Mayhem snickered. "I didn't tell Aker all the secrets of my time machine. It can be operated automatically. After I sent you two back into the past I joined you, just to keep an eye on things. It took me six experimental trips before I arrived in the mind of someone of importance, where I could be sure I'd hear everything that went on in Rome."

Pete's eyes widened. "So you were there? But who—who were you? And anyhow"—Pete chuckled reproachfully—"that wasn't exactly fair when you come right down to it."

Dr. Mayhem's face cracked into a broad grin. "You shouldn't say things like that, Pete. It might get you tossed to the lions! I was Messalina. And don't forget Messalina was Caesar's wife. And Caesar's wife is above reproach!"



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SAN JOSE CALIFORNIA

Cowled dark veils and capes swirled and enveloped Joan as she stood blank-eyed

THE RETURN OF

A Curt Newton Novelet

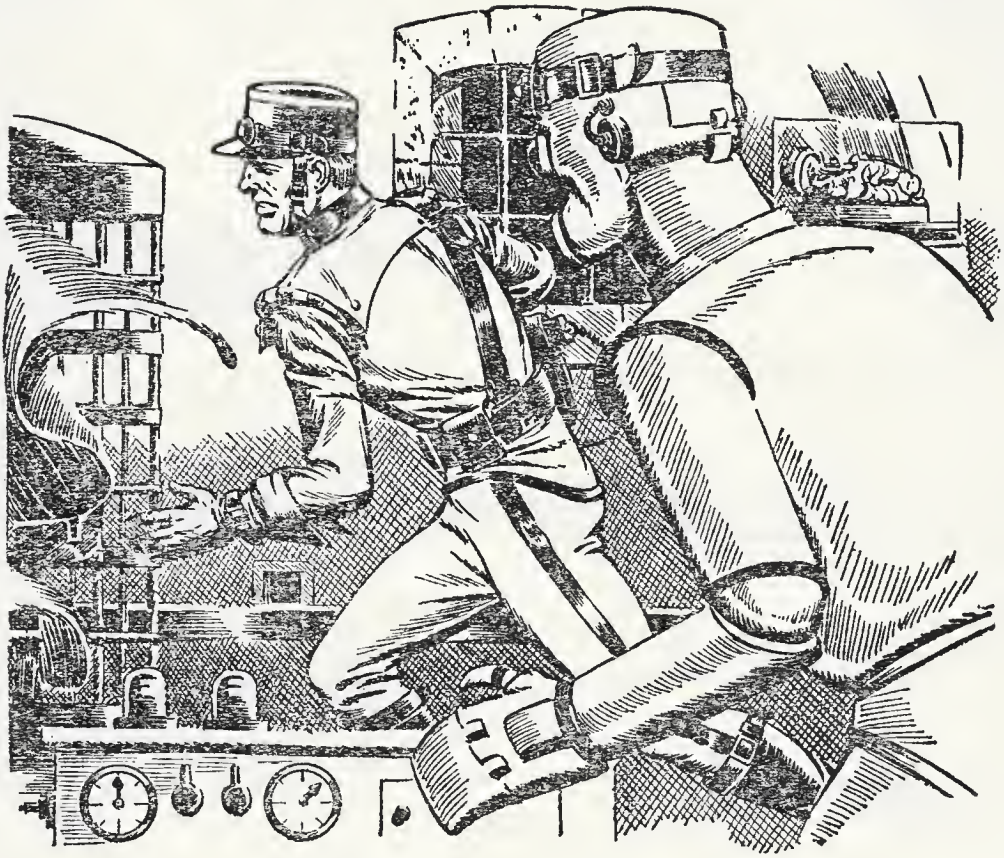
CHAPTER I

In the Moon-laboratory

THERE were four of them, and only one of them was a man. One had been a man once, but only his brain and mind still lived. One looked like a man, but was born of no woman. And one was mighty, and metal, and only rudely manlike.

"There were four of them—the man, the brain, the android and the robot. And that strange quartet of inseparable

The Man of Tomorrow Clashes in Fierce Combat



CAPTAIN FUTURE

by EDMOND HAMILTON

comrades blazed a trail that the System will never forget. They rocked worlds, in their time. They pioneered the ways to the stars. And then they went beyond the stars, they went out into the outer darkness—and never returned."

The teleview commentator's voice was full of hard, bright drama that went no deeper than his lips. To him, it was just another story, to be exploited and for-

with Mankind's Deadliest Enemy — the Linid!

gotten as soon as it was told.

To Joan Randall, sitting alone in an office of Planet Patrol Base in New York, the words he spoke had the icy finality of a requiem.

With a gesture of denial, her hand moved to switch off the televiewer. Yet she paused a moment, as though yearning to hear again the name that was coming.

"They went out into the extra-galactic darkness three years ago today—those four whom the System called Captain Future and the Futuremen. No one knows the purpose of their quest, unless it be those two members of the Patrol who alone had their complete confidence. But it is known that they promised to return in less than a year.

"They did not return. They have never returned. Did Curtis Newton and his three strange comrades, somewhere out there in the infinite, meet foes or forces too formidable even for them? Did they, out there, find a tomb in endless space where—"

"No!" the girl cried, and snapped the switch.

Silence. But the echoes fled across her heart, asking, *Did they? Did they?* And her heart could not answer.

She rose and walked restlessly to the long windows that opened on a tiny balcony. Presently she went outside and stood there, looking up into the dark night sky, not seeing it, seeing only the blacker eternity of space and a ship that drifted there forever, lightless and silent as the void itself.

HER fingers closed hard around the metal railing. She said again, to the whole universe, "No!"

The universe did not answer. There was no answer anywhere, and as she watched, the silent Moon arose and mocked her.

The sound of her office door brought her to herself again. She turned and then called out, "Ezra!"

The man who had just come in said, "Hello, Joan." He flung himself into a chair and watched her with bleak eyes, as she came toward him. He was a stocky man, worn hard and lean and gray with years of service. He was Marshal Ezra Gurney of the Planet Patrol, and he was a tired, beaten man.

"I talked to them, Joan," he said. "I took it right up to the top brass. I even cussed the President."

"What did they say?"

He told her, brutally, because the words hurt him. "They said Curt Newton and the Futuremen are dead. They were nice about it. They understood how I felt. But they can't run the Government on sentiment. The vote has been taken, and they won't change it. They're going to take over the Moon-laboratory."

His voice was curiously flat. He would not meet Joan's eyes.

"I've done all I can, Joan. They won't listen."

The girl said, "I thought they might wait, just a little longer."

"They've already waited. Two years is the legal limit for men lost in space. And it's been three."

"But not Curt!" she flared. "He's not like other men. And Grag, and Otho, and Simon Wright—" She bent over the old marshal, forcing him to look at her. "You do believe that, Ezra? You do believe they'll come back?"

Gurney's massive shoulders sagged. He seemed suddenly shrunken, looking all his age, again avoiding her gaze.

"They went too far, Joan," he muttered. "They tried to burst barriers no one could get through, in that attempt to reach Andromeda galaxy. We ought never to have let 'em go."

"I tried to stop them!" cried the girl. "But you know yourself how little chance I had!"

Little chance, indeed! Captain Future and Simon Wright, the Brain, had been too eager to solve the secret of humanity's galactic past.

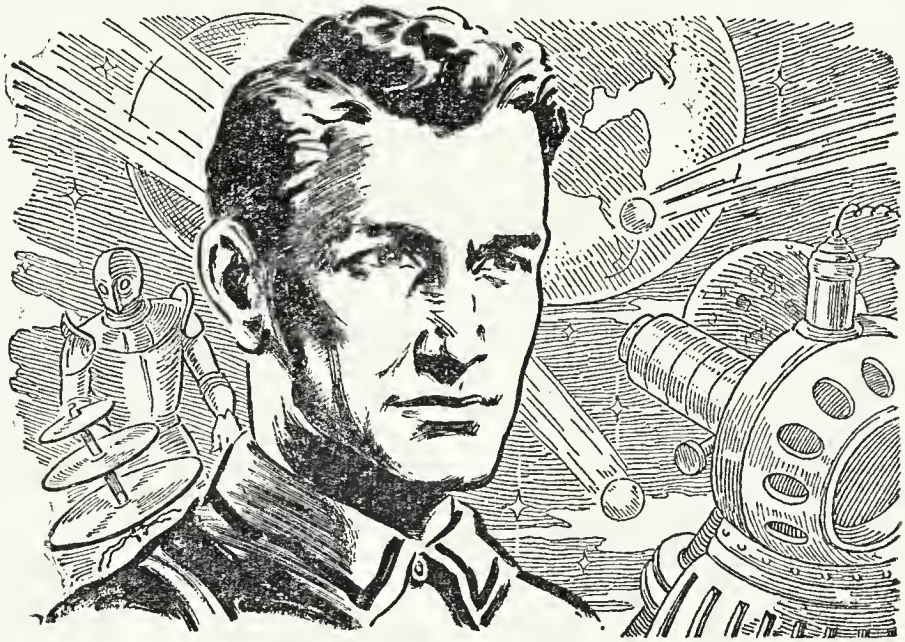
They had, for years, been penetrating deeper and deeper into that past, had uncovered the story of the Old Empire, the great human civilization that had ruled the stars a million years ago. They had even learned dimly of the prehuman races before that, the legendary Linids and the others.

Curt Newton and the Brain had been afire to learn the rest of the story. They had discovered that the first humans of the Old Empire had come from Andromeda galaxy. It had been inevitable that they would try to go there, to track down that cosmic secret of human origins.

"But no danger they might meet, even out there, could be great enough to overwhelm the *Futuremen!*" Joan cried.

The old marshal spoke heavily. "The Futuremen were only mortal, Joan."

He looked up at her now, and his face was gray and sick.



CAPTAIN FUTURE

"We might as well face it. We might as well quit feeding ourselves false hopes. If they were coming back, they'd have come by now."

The girl stared at him, stricken. The old space veteran looked at her, and the pity in his eyes was hard to bear.

"You think so too, Joan. You know you do."

The life seemed to go out of her face. "Yes," she whispered dully. She turned and pressed her throbbing forehead against the cold window. "Yes, I do. The System has lost him. And I've lost him."

She felt his rough paw on her shoulder. "You never had him, Joan. No one ever did—not a man like Curt Newton, who was raised by a brain and a robot and an android, who never quite belonged to us others."

"I know," she whispered. "But I couldn't help thinking that someday—"

She stopped, and did not speak again for a time. The Moon rode white and cold in the dark sky. She watched it, and presently she said:

"So now they're going to take the last of him. His birthplace, his home—the work he did, the things that he and the others put all their minds and hopes into, to help mankind. There won't be even a memory of him left."

Ezra said awkwardly, "Try not to look at it that way. They have to do it, Joan. The things in that Moon-laboratory are too dangerous to take chances with. Criminals have tried many times to get through the barriers and steal the Futuremen's secrets. One of them might do it. And the knowledge sealed up there should be used, not lost."

Joan nodded. "I suppose so." She frowned suddenly. "Secrets? Ezra, there are things there that Curt wouldn't want

anyone, not even the Government, to have. Things that wouldn't be safe for even the top scientists to experiment with. We can't let him down on that much, at least!"

Ezra looked at her sharply. "You're right, Joan. I remember some of the things he showed us, and some that he only hinted at."

He thought hard for a few moments, pondering the numerous angles involved. Finally he said:

"Yes. We've got enough time. Not much, but enough if we hurry."

QUITE suddenly, Joan and Ezra looked almost themselves again. Here was something to do, definite action to relieve their minds of the quiet brooding that was so hard to endure.

"We'll get the things out of the Moon-laboratory," Joan said. "We'll hide them, where they'll be safe. And then, if ever—" She stopped short and then went on again, lamely, "If ever it's safe to give those secrets, we'll know where they are."

"Curt would want us to do that," Gurney said. He grinned and turned to the door. "We'll be court-martialed if we're caught. But we're a brace of old foxes for catching! Let's go."

No questions were asked of Marshal Gurney and Special Agent Joan Randall. The Patrol simply cleared the way for them with swift efficiency, and within an hour, Gurney's small flyer had blasted off for the Moon.

The two of them did not talk much. Joan watched the great dark bulk of Earth fall away from them, and then she looked through the forward port at their destination. She thought of all the times Captain Future had come this way, bound for home.

Home—Curt's home. And his birthplace. Strange cradle for a child, the awesome, lifeless Moon! And strange eyes had watched, strange hands had served, that child.

Child of human parents, yes—of the Earth scientist and his wife who had gone to the Moon with their colleague for secret research. With their colleague, he who had once been Dr. Simon Wright but who had become the Brain.

In the Moon-laboratory they had built there, their science had created Grag, the robot, and Otho, the android. So that, after his parents' tragic death, it had been Brain and robot and android who had been this child's guardians!

Joan imagined again, as she had so many times before, how it must have been for Curt to grow up there, to have his first view of Earth through the great glassite ceiling of the laboratory, to hear speech first from the strange mouths of Grag and Otho and Simon Wright, to play his childish games up and down the sunken corridors of the laboratory under Tycho, with a robot, an android and a living Brain for playmates.

She pictured a small red-haired boy looking out at the bitter lunar peaks and pitiless rock plains, and thought how lonely he must have been sometimes. And there were tears in her eyes, not for the boy, but for the man he had become. For loneliness had been Curt's heritage, had stamped him with a subtle something that set him apart from other men.

It was fitting that, if he had to die, Curt Newton had done that too in a vast loneliness, far from other men, voyaging out with his three comrades to new continents of stars far beyond the little ken of man.

The surface of the Moon plunged upward toward them, became a bas-relief in cruel black and white. The soaring peaks of Tycho crater tore the airless sky like hungry fangs. The little flyer passed over them, sank down on blazing keel-jets to the floor of the crater.

Silently, Joan and Ezra got into space-suits and went out of the flyer, onto the surface of the Moon.

They had been here before. They knew their way. They found the hidden entrance, and Ezra, plodding and careful, operated the controls that opened the guarded door. Death, swift and terrible, awaited men who did not know the combination. The Futuremen had kept their secrets well.

A section of lunar rock slid aside, re-

vealing a dark stairway. They went down, and the rock closed again over their heads.

They went down some distance, into the airlock. Its automatic controls worked smoothly. The two waited until the dials showed that the lock chamber had filled with air. Then they removed their space-suits and went toward the inner doors.

For the first time, Joan faltered.

"I don't think I can," she whispered. "To go in there, knowing that he isn't there, that he won't ever be there again—"

His home. The table where he worked, the bed where he slept, the little things he left behind, forever.

She clung to Ezra, sobbing, and he stroked her with his big hands.

"Come now," he murmured. "Curt wouldn't want you crying."

She took a deep breath. "I wonder!" she said, with a sudden burst of anger at the whole vast cruelty of fate that had made her love such a man. "I wonder if he'd care at all whether I cried or not!"

She flung her head back and went on through the inner lock. Ezra came close behind her.

The stairway beyond was dark. They started down it, conscious that their boots rang loud in the rocky vault, conscious of the silence, of being two intruders in a deserted place on a lifeless world.

Three steps downward. Four. Five.

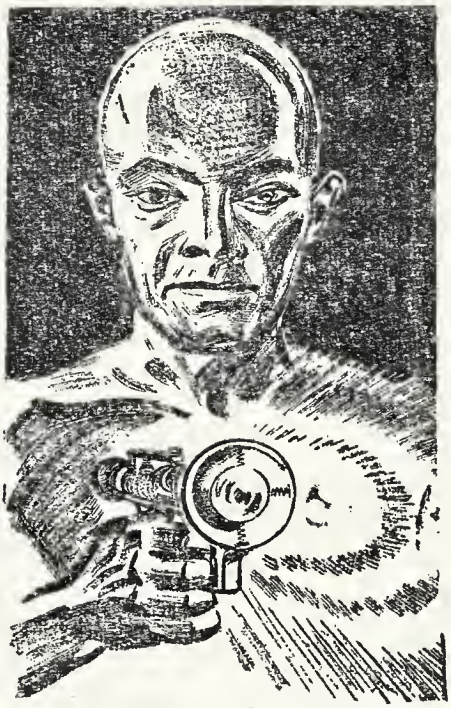
Joan screamed. The cry burst in jagged echoes from the rock, and Ezra cried out too, a deep, harsh yell.

They were prisoned, pinioned, caught. From nowhere, out of the darkness and the silence, an iron grasp had reached and trapped them.

Quite suddenly, there was light.

Joan turned her head.

A towering shadow behind her, a monstrous unhuman shadow with a face of metal, expressionless and strange. The strength of metal arms holding her against a mighty metal body, a chill, imponderable force from which there was no escape.



OTHO

Ezra Gurney made a queer sound in his throat.

Joan ceased to struggle. Her body went limp, and there was a sudden dusk before her eyes. Her mouth formed a word that was almost no word at all, it was so full of tears and joyous anguish.

The rocky walls gave back the word again and again. It was a name, and the name the rock walls said was *Grag! Grag! Grag!*

CHAPTER II

Futuremen's Return

GRAG. Grag the robot, the metal giant of the Futuremen!

Joan felt herself set down, very gently. She heard voices, Grag's booming metallic tones saying apologetically:

"Joan! Ezra! I didn't know it was

you. The alarm rang, but there was no way of knowing who was coming in."

Another voice, silken, sibilant, saying angrily, "You big cast-iron stupe, you've scared her half to death! Look out, she's going to faint!"

She did.

Lights, darkness, confusion. A dim sensation of being carried. Then she was lying somewhere in a vortex of swirling mists.

Shapes hovered above her. They were terribly indistinct. Ezra. Grag's looming metal bulk. And another face, white-skinned, peculiarly slim and pointed, that looked at her with brilliant eyes and spoke her name, and she answered, "Otho!"

The mists closed in again. And she was searching, desperate, sick with the pounding of her own heart, and she could not see—

Another form came clear. A small, square, transparent case, hovering man-high above the floor—a thing utterly strange and yet familiar. The artificial "body" that housed the living brain of Simon Wright.

Simon would know. She must ask him. But she could not—

Somewhere, in another universe, a voice called her. It was like no other voice.

"Joan! Joan!" it said, and her mind and heart fled toward it, fighting back the mists.

A spinning blur of light, a sense of all her being leaping upward, and he was there, bent over her, his gray eyes anxious, the strong remembered lines of his face softened now almost to tenderness.

"Curt," she whispered. "You're alive. You're safe."

She began to cry. He kissed her, and she clung blindly to him.

Then suddenly she sat up, thrusting Curt Newton away. She stared at him, her eyes bright with tears and fury.

"Why didn't you tell us?" she cried out. "Why did you let us think you were dead? Haven't you any heart at all?"

She looked around at the others, Grag and Otho and the Brain. The Futuremen looked away, embarrassed.

Even Simon, the Brain that long ago had lived in a man's skull but lived now in a cubical case, with serum for blood and a serum-pump for heart—even he shifted uneasily on the unseen magnetic beams that were his means of motion, his lens-eyes looking away from her.

Big Grag, ordinarily capable of unhuman immobility, fidgeted clankingly. And the android, most manlike of the three, human in all but origin, dropped his bright ironic gaze.

"You must have known how we felt," she accused. "You came back—how long ago? Weeks, months? You came back safely, and you didn't tell us!"

She was trembling, now. She turned on Curt Newton almost as though she wanted to strike him.

"I'm sorry, Joan." Captain Future stepped back, not looking at her. "I—we knew how you'd feel. But we couldn't tell anybody. Not just yet."

In the harsh light from the ceiling dome, his face showed lined and tired. It had hardened somehow, and changed. It was the face of a man driven by some iron purpose, and the eyes had a shadow in them, something dark and strange.

Ezra Gurney looked at him intently. "You must have had a reason. A good reason." Being older, he was willing to reserve his hurt and anger. His voice shook with eagerness as he went on.

"Did you reach Andromeda galaxy, Curt?"

Captain Future said briefly, "We reached it."

Even Joan forgot her emotions in the sweeping wonder of those three words.

"You reached it," she whispered. Then she sat quite still in awe. Andromeda galaxy. An alien continent of suns, washed by the farthest tides of space. An incredible, magnificent journey. Curt Newton had dreamed his dream, and made it come true.

"Did you find what you were looking for?" Ezra demanded. "The secret of the human race's origin?"

Curt shook his head. He said indirectly, "A lot happened. Trouble, near-wreck, the usual hazards. We were lucky to get back."

He smiled abruptly, a smile that pretended to be easy and was not.

"Will you two trust me? There's something I have to do, and I want you both to go back to Earth now. I'll be along, and then I'll tell you all you want to know."

Joan got up. She took hold of Curt and looked into his eyes.

"You're afraid," she said. "Afraid for me, for us, if we stay here. Why?"

GRAG

"Nonsense." His scoffing retort had an unconvincing heartiness. "Go along now, Joan." He looked at Ezra over her shoulder, a glance full of hard meaning. "Take her back, will you, Ezra?"

THE Brain spoke, in his dry, mechanical voice.

"Curt is right, Joan. We have much to do, with the specimens we brought back with us. You'd only be in the way."

"Sure," boomed Grag loudly to her. "No fun for you, looking at a lot of old rocks and things."

"Stop lying to me, all of you!" cried Joan angrily. She looked around at them, Captain Future and the incredible trio of his comrades. She saw that even in Otho's bright, mocking eyes, the dark shadow lurked.

"You are afraid. Every one of you. You're afraid for Ezra and me, or you wouldn't want us to go. You brought something back with you, that's it! You brought something back, and you're afraid of it. So afraid that you didn't dare let anyone know you had returned."

No one answered her. And in the brooding silence of the laboratory under Tycho, a breath of fear touched Joan and Erza Gurney—a black and freezing breath of terror from beyond the intergalactic abysses.

Ezra spoke, asking of them all, "What did you find out there?"

Curt Newton answered slowly. "Some of the history of the Old Race, the ancient humans. We hoped to find them, but didn't. They'd gone on long ago, to some farther part of the universe. The Old Empire, ebbing back toward its unknown center as Rome ebbed back when it fell.

"But we did find worlds where they had lived. Worlds of deserted, silent cities, worlds of death, worlds of mystery."

The Brain said in his precise, emotionless way, "We found many records and inscriptions, in the language of the Old Empire—the so-called Denebian tongue we could already read. They were half-ruined, half-effaced, by time. But even those broken records told a strange, grand story."

Like a man haunted by a dream far greater than himself, Curt Newton began to tell that story. Red head bent forward, eyes seeming to look beyond time and space, he spoke.

"Some of this you know already. You helped us track down the mystery of mankind across the star-worlds of our own galaxy, until we found that the answer lay still farther on, beyond the gulfs of outer space. Well, we know now that answer lies even beyond Andromeda. But we have learned a great deal.

"We know how the human race, the Old Race, came from some unknown birthplace and spread out across the universe. The Old Empire, that held whole galaxies as we hold worlds. Even some of the details we know—how the Old

Race battled for supremacy against the pre-human alien empires, such as the Linids."

The muscles drew tight around his mouth. He said that name again, very softly.

"The Linids. The wise and dreadful creatures who were before man, and who came so near to stopping his march of empire—so near to destroying the whole human adventure. They were great and proud, the Linids. They held whole galaxies for ages before the little creeping bipeds came. They did not like the intrusion.

"Out there on Andromeda galaxy, long ages ago, the last battle between Linids and men was fought. And our remote ancestors won it. That's what we found, the half-effaced records, the broken memorials, of that eon-old struggle. That, and the cryptic clues that merely deepened the mystery of our racial origins."

Curt Newton was silent for a time, caught up in the passion of his dream. His three strange comrades looked at him in silence too.

Ezra Gurney felt again the strength of the bond between the Futuremen. He and Joan could never, even by the greatness of their love, quite penetrate that inner bond of the four. Always, a little, he and she would be outsiders.

Joan said quietly, "You found more out there than knowledge. You might as well tell me, Curt. Because I will not go away."

"No," said Ezra. "Nor I. We've never backed out on danger yet."

Captain Future's haggard eyes sought Simon Wright. "What shall I do, Simon?"

The Brain answered, "They have made their decision. It is what they want."

"Very well," said Curt. His hands fell on their shoulders, gave each of them a strong grip. He smiled, and this time the smile was very weary, but not forced. "I should have known."

He led the way, then, across the great central room of the laboratory, a vast circular space cut from the lunar rock, crammed with apparatus of all kinds. Smaller rooms and corridors opened off the main room. Living quarters, chambers that held supplies, the corridor that led to the hangar of their ship, the *Comet*.

Two small, queer beasts, completely dissimilar to each other, came rushing up to Joan and Ezra and leaped frantically around their legs.

On Ezra's strained face flickered a brief smile. "I see you and Grag still have your pets, Otho."

Joan could not stop for them. Eek, the gray, snouted, metal-eating moon-pup, and Oog, the fat little white mimic-beast, had been dear to her. But even their gambolling welcome could not break her spell of dread.

And the two little beasts drew back from her when they saw the door to which Curt Newton was leading, the door of one of the smaller chambers. They backed away, as though in fear, when he opened that door.

"In here," said Captain Future.

Joan and Ezra stood quite still, looking in.

There was a machine in the center of that rock-walled room. A cage-like thing of crystal rods and shining wires. It seemed very frail, to hold what was in it. It pulsed with a steady rhythmic beat of force throughout its rods and coils, so that the crystal flickered with diamond points of light.

"The machine," said the Brain, "creates a complete stasis within itself. Within that cage that appears so simple, time, entropy, motion, cannot exist."

JOAN had shrunk back against Curt. Her eyes were fixed on what lay there, so still within its cage of force.

The thing had a central core of denser darkness, cowled by looped dark capes and veils. And core and capes and veils seemed solid, tangible—but not like flesh.

The design and function of this creature were so completely alien to the known evolutionary scale that their eyes could not comprehend its form. Yet something in the frozen immobility of

the cowled thing and its folded and floating veils hinted a protean *impermanence* of form.

Even now, lifeless and insentient as it was, a feeling of power lay in that cryptic cowled form. Joan felt her flesh draw in upon itself with instinctive recoil, and it seemed that in her heart she could feel a black and icy tide that flowed from the thing, a sense of horror at beholding something so completely divorced from all life as she knew it.

"What is it?" she whispered.

"One of the first lords of the galaxies," Newton answered. "A Linid."

Somehow, just to know it had a name made it less shocking. Joan forced herself to look again.

"We found it," said Otho slowly, "in one of the dead cities of the old human race, out there."

"*I* found it," Grag corrected him. "I was the one who broke open that crypt under the Hall of Ninety Suns. And if it hadn't been for me, you couldn't have moved it."

"Strong back," said Otho, "weak mind." But his heart was not in his gibing. The dark sleeper held them all in a mood of awe.

"And millions of years ago, things like that were the lords of creation?" Ezra said, incredulously.

Curt nodded broodingly. "Yes. They held the galaxies before man. They warred with man, with the Old Race. Yet it was not man alone who doomed them. A species has its day, and theirs was done.

"They passed, like many another great species, largely because of a change in natural conditions. We think, from what we learned, that in the Linids' case the fatal change was that of entropy, the increase of cosmic radiation somehow adversely affecting their alien form of life."

"That thing," Joan breathed, "dead and perfectly preserved for all these ages!"

Captain Future's eyes had a queer look.

"That's just it, Joan. *It isn't dead.*"

His words echoed in the rocky vault like the living voice of danger.

As though by common instinct, they drew away from the door. For a time no one spoke. Then Simon Wright supplied the explanation.

"The records tell us that the Old Race won the galactic war with the Linids—but that even they could not destroy them. The Linids were a form of life too different for human science to destroy. They could only prison them, using a stasis of force like this one.

"There were warnings. If the stasis were lifted, the Linid would regain life and consciousness. It would be as though all these eons had not passed. It would regain its full power—and the records caution all who read that the Linid had a terrible power. '*—a power of utter possession, against which only the jewels of force are protection.*' "

"*If* the stasis were lifted—" Joan said. "No! Curt, you're not going to—"

Her voice trailed away. Curt's face was a thing cut from granite.

"We're going to lift it—a little. Enough to revive the thing, but still keep it prisoned. We're sure we can communicate with it telepathically." He was drawn and sweating with strain, with worry, with a fierce excitement.

"We know the risk we're taking. But we've got to do it! This survivor of a vanished eon can tell us things about the past that we'd never know.

"But you shouldn't take that risk, Joan. You and Ezra must go."

They answered as with one voice, "No." And Ezra added, "From the look of that thing, you may need an extra hand."

Curt sighed. "All right. We're not going into this completely without defense. There were jewels of force also in the Hall of the Ninety Suns. The Old Race must have used it as some sort of meeting ground with the Linids, when they parleyed for the rule of Andromeda. We brought them back, too."

He produced them, from a guarded locker. They were like no normal jewel. They were round, and large, and black with the utter depthless blackness of the Linid itself. Each jewel formed the cen-

ter boss of a light metal headband.

In a vast and crushing silence, the six armed themselves, donning the headbands. The Brain made his secure by binding it around his case.

"We don't know how these jewels work," muttered Otho. "It's to be presumed that they're effective."

Simon Wright said dryly, "I think we can trust the Old Race. Are you ready, Curtis?"

"Yes."

"Then let us go."

They went back into the room where the cowled shape of darkness slept. Now Joan and Ezra saw beside the stasis-machine a tall and boxlike apparatus with an ordinary loudspeaker set in its face.

"That's the telepatho-mechanical interpreter that we've constructed," Otho told them.

Simon Wright explained. "The jewels protect against mental attack by shutting out all foreign telepathic impulses. We could project thoughts but could not hear the telepathic answers. But that apparatus will take the thought-impulses of the Linid and translate them electronically into audible speech, so we can communicate with it without danger."

He looked at Captain Future. And Curt, after opening the switch of the interpreter, stepped past it to the glimmering cage.

His hand reached out. Carefully, with infinite caution, he moved a rheostat, one notch. . . . Two.

The pulsing flicker of light faded just a bit in the crystal. The rods and wires dimmed their brilliance.

And the cowled shape of darkness stirred.

Curt stepped back from the machine. Otherwise, there was no sound, no motion, among them.

The Linid's capes and veils coiled and unfolded languidly about its central core. And there was a subtle chill that struck Curt's mind even through the barrier of the jewel, a faint dusk of horror.

The Linid had awakened.

CHAPTER III

Alien Enemy

CURT NEWTON was distantly aware of the rocklike stillness of his own body, the muscles drawn tight to the cracking point. Somewhere deep within him there was fear such as he had never known in all his adventurous life, an atavistic horror that comes usually only in nightmare. His heart pounded with such vaulting excitement that he found it difficult to breathe.

The dark veils shifted and swirled within the crystal cage. Slowly, fighting against the partial stasis that still held it, the cowled thing put forth its shifting members, unfolding, probing, testing. The capes and veils touched the shining rods. They recoiled, and presently were still, but not as they had been before. They were alive now. They rippled with a terrible bridled strength. They were crouched and waiting.

Curt knew that the Linid was watching him.

He could see it watch. The central core of darkness beneath the veils had taken on a somber gleaming, and he thought of the hearts of dark nebulae seen from space, the clusters of brooding suns. He looked into that sentient core, and sensed intelligence, wisdom—a force primal and resistless as death.

A force that reached out subtle fingers to his mind, and then recoiled, even as the physical body had done. The jewels had reacted to their proper stimulus. Captain Future saw that he and the others were enveloped now in dusky auras that shrouded them from head to foot. He guessed then that the "jewels" were intricate receivers and transformers, gathering the telepathic thrust of the Linid mind, amplifying it, using it as a shield of defense. Advanced application of the old, crude principle of fighting an adversary with his own strength!

Curt was suddenly, passionately

grateful for the jewels of force. That faint touch of the Linid's mind against his had been enough. It was like the touch of withering cold that lies in the great deeps where no life has ever been.

Curt spoke, forming his thought clearly into words so that the others should hear and understand. This was the test. If the Linid was truly telepathic, as they were convinced, the shrouds of time could be ripped aside from the face of cosmic history.

Think strongly. Think clearly. Project the thought outward through the dusky aura of the jewel. There must have been communication once between man and Linid, in the Hall of Ninety Suns!

"Can you hear my thought? Can you hear me?"

He waited, and there was no answer. The creature watched, and brooded.

Curt's heart sank. Could they have misunderstood the records of the Old Race? No, he could not believe that.

"Answer me! *Can you hear my thought?*"

Silence. The dark cowls stirred, and beneath them the black core gloomed, and there was no sound from the telepathic interpreter.

Without knowing how he knew, Captain Future sensed that the creature's silence mocked him.

He strode forward, and there was a towering anger in him now, partly born of fear.

"So you cannot hear me," he said savagely. "You cannot speak. Very well. You shall sleep again."

He reached out his hand to the rheostat.

The veils rippled strongly, and the dark core gave out a bitter gleam. Abruptly, startlingly loud on the tense air, the toneless metallic voice of the mechanical interpreter spoke out.

"I hear you, human!"

A small gasping whisper ran among the five who waited. Sweat broke chill on Curt's body. The thing was done.

But he did not take his hand away. He held the rheostat, looking straight into the heart of the alien being, and he made his thought masterful and harsh.

"You know that you cannot escape! You know that I have but to move my hand, and you will sink again into helpless unconsciousness."

Again, no answer. Curt's voice, matching the thought he projected, suddenly crackled.

"You know that, do you not?"

This time the toneless mechanical voice answered with sullen slowness.

"I know it."

Captain Future's forehead was damp. He was trying to win psychological authority over a mind so vast and strange he could not even comprehend it.

Yet that mind could understand his power to chain it again in frozen, unconscious stasis! He was counting on that as his lever to force from the Linid what he wanted to know.

And what he wanted to know was the secret of the galaxies' history, of humanity's origin—no less! A superhuman tension grew in Curt Newton as he saw himself on the last threshold of the mystery that he and the Futuremen had tracked across space and time.

He spoke in a hard voice. "Linid, there is something I can give you. And there is something you can give to me—knowledge!"

"Knowledge?" jeered the metallic voice. "Give the knowledge of the galactic lords to humans, so that they may use it against us?"

"Not that kind of knowledge," Curt said swiftly. "Not knowledge of weapons or forces. But knowledge of the galaxies' past, of your race's past, of *my* people's past."

"Shall I tell the wisdom of the Linids to the crawling, verminous new hordes of man? Human—no!"

CURT had expected that answer. He said steadily, "Remember, there is something that I can give you in return."

"What can you give me, human?"

"Freedom! Release from the stasis that prisons you!"

He caught the Linid with that. He

knew it, from the sudden swirl of its capes and veils, from the pulse of movement that ran through all the cowled thing's strange body.

Joan's voice cut in. Her face was pallid, horrified. "Curt, even for knowledge you wouldn't *release* that thing?"

"It'd be crazy, suicidal!" exclaimed Ezra, aghast.

Curt did not turn, as he answered them. His thought spoke as much to the Linid, as his words did to them.

"I'd not release it here, never fear. A small robot ship would carry it, still in its stasis-cage, far across the galactic abysses. And far across the universe, automatic controls would lift the stasis. It would take very long—but time is little to this creature.

"Freedom!" he repeated again to the cowled thing. "Not immediate, but eventual. That is what I can give you."

"My brothers will give me that when they come at last and destroy you humans," retorted the toneless voice.

Curt felt a surprise. Then the Linid did not guess how long had been the ages it had lain unconscious—how much had happened in those ages? Yet after all, the creature had no way to guess.

He would not tell it. It would not believe him, he was sure. And there was no way to convince it.

"Have your brothers come yet?" Curt taunted. "Did they come while you lay frozen under the Hall of Ninety Suns?"

There was a hesitation of silence on the part of the Linid. Then, finally, came a counter-question.

"What guarantee have I that you would fulfill your bargain, human?"

Captain Future's mind lit to a soaring exultation. He was winning.

"No guarantee, except my promise," he answered flatly. "There is no alternative."

"All the universe knows that man is the one creature who lies," came the Linid's bitter words. "But—I would be free again. I must trust a human. I will give you what knowledge I can, for freedom."

Otho uttered a hissing sigh. "We've got him!"

"Then answer this," Curt Newton said. "Whence, in the beginning, came our race?"

The question seemed to startle the Linid. "Do not you know?"

"If I knew, would I ask you?" Curt retorted savagely. "Answer, Linid!"

"Truly the sons of man are crawling vermin of an hour only, who know not their own fathers!" spoke the mechanical voice.

Curt disregarded the jeer. "Who *were* the fathers of man? From where did he spring?"

The cowled thing brooded, its capes and veils folding, unfolding. Finally, the toneless voice of the interpreter came again.

"Humans, you are new upstarts in the universe. Ignorant of all its mighty past, even your own past. Yet how could you petty spawn of flesh, that die almost as soon as born, know the grandeur of dead cycles?

"We Linids know. We are not of flesh like your flesh, we do not live with your life. For we are not children of the transient light but of the eternal darkness. Yes, children of the dark nebulae and not of the bright galaxies! So that *we* are not chained to rigid bone and flesh that must soon crumble and die, but are in body like the ever-changing yet changeless dark clouds where we evolved."

Captain Future felt a shock of memory. He remembered how the first sight of the Linid had made him think irresistibly of the coiling gleam of the extra-galactic dark nebulae.

The toneless metallic voice seemed to grow louder, prouder—an illusion lent it by the words it spoke.

"Forth from our dark home, we Linids went long ago, we who can fly space bodily and need no crude mechanical ships! Forth we went to many galaxies, to conquer and hold them for our race.

"The glory of the Linids! The wisdom and the power that have brought great realms of stars beneath our sway! The wars that we fought across the starry abysses with other mighty races who

challenged us, and whom we met and defeated and destroyed!"

"All except the race of man!" Curt Newton reminded tensely. "Whence came *he?*"

"Yes—man." The interpreting voice spoke the words flatly yet they seemed to throb a bitter hatred. "The creature lower than the dust, that was raised up by the First-Born as a final challenge to us!"

NEWTON was as rigid as though the very portals of an eon-old, lost cosmic past were opening tangibly before him.

"The First-Born? Who were they, Linid? Who?"

"They were before the Linids," came the sullenly slow reply. "They were not like us, nor like any of the other races, nor like you humans, say the legends.

"They were mighty in wisdom—all the universe knew it. But they were mad dreamers. They dreamed of a universe utterly and completely ruled by justice. And they set out to accomplish that dream.

"They could not do it! They, the First-Born, whom all the universe had whispered of for eons, could not subdue us Linids, nor even all our rival-races! They went back to their secret worlds, in defeat!

"They said, did the First-Born—'We failed to bring the universe under one law because, great as was our wisdom, we are not physically or psychically adaptable to all the varying worlds of the universe. Our dream is dead, and with it passes our reason for life, so we too shall pass. But, before we depart, let us raise up a new race that will be supple and adaptable enough to succeed someday where we failed.'

"And for such an heir, the First-Born raised up—man! The crawling apes, the unclean, chattering horde of the far worlds, the liars, the cheats, the cunning ones! They said, 'Though he is all these things, in him is the seed of power, of power some day to unite the universe under the law of justice as we dreamed of doing.'

"So, from the noisy apes, the First-Born developed your race, human! A race that had no attribute of the great galactic races, that had nothing but curiosity—curiosity that unlocked powers for it that it could ill use. So your race was first loosed upon the universe far away in lost ages, by the First-Born before they passed!"

As the mechanical voice paused, Captain Future stood with a wild thrilling in his nerves.

Cosmic mystery dispelled at last—even though beyond it loomed deeper and older mysteries!

"So *that* is the secret of man's cosmic origin!" breathed Joan.

"Yet apes evolved to men on Earth too, the scientists say," muttered Ezra, bewilderedly.

The Linid answered him mockingly. "Always and on many worlds, the humans whom the First-Born raised from apehood slip *back* quickly to the ape, and must toilsomely climb again."

"But where did the First-Born do this?" Curt Newton pressed. "Where, amid the galaxies, was their home?"

"Not even the Linids know that," was the answer. "Though there are traditions—"

The creature's toneless, translated speech halted. A queer tense immobility had come over its coiling capes and veils.

"What traditions?" pressed Captain Future harshly. "Speak, if you wish eventual freedom!"

He was unaware, as he himself spoke, of a small gray shape that had crept silently into the room.

The Linid's translated voice spoke, suddenly rapid. "I shall tell you what I know. Perhaps it answers your question. Listen closely—"

They strained forward, hungering for every word. And then, out of the corner of his eye, Curt Newton saw motion—looked, and saw Eek the moon-pup, going with a strangely swift and stealthy rush toward Joan.

Realization came to him with a sickening shock. He leaped forward, crying out a warning, and knew as he did so

that it was too late, that he had made a fatal blunder. He had forgotten Eek. He had forgotten the moon-pup's highly telepathic mind. And the Linid had reached out and found the one unshielded, receptive tool. All this rapid talk, this promise of a final piece of knowledge, had been to distract their attention.

There was an alarmed uproar, triggered by Captain Future's cry. Joan turned. Curt's hand brushed the small hurtling body, but it was going fast, too fast. Eek sprang, unerringly, straight for Joan's face.

His jaws caught the jewel of force, and ripped it from the girl's head.

Eek fell to the floor, taking the jewel with him, and was instantly docile. And Curt Newton made a desperate lunge for Joan.

For she had whirled around, the instant the protective aura left her. She was leaping toward the rheostat of the stasis-cage.

The Linid had no use for Eek now. It had a better tool.

Joan was closer to the machine than Curt. He might have shot her—that alone would have stopped her in time.

Her hand opened the rheostat wide, in an instant.

And, with supernal swiftness, the Linid was out of the broken stasis and had grasped her.

Cowled dark veils and capes swirled and enveloped Joan as she stood blank-eyed.

With a hoarse cry, Curt sprang forward. Grag leaped with him, uttering a booming roar, and Otho and Ezra and Simon.

They recoiled. They shrank back from what was happening to Joan. Ezra covered his face with his hands.

The Linid was melting into her body! The dark capes and veils, even the darker, denser core of the thing, were sinking into Joan's flesh!

"—a power of utter possession, against which only the jewels of force are protection."

Utter possession. Curt knew now, with agonizing clarity, what the inscription had meant. Not just mental possession but *physical* possession also—the solid body of the Linid entering and interpenetrating the solid body of its victim, due to an unearthly power of manipulating its bodily atoms that only so alien a creature could have.

Joan stood before them, face dark, masklike and strange, eyes pits of swirling shadows that looked at the stricken Futuremen and Ezra.

Words that were not her own came mockingly from her stiff lips.

"Now, humans, shall we speak of freedom for me?"

CHAPTER IV

Last Weapon

TO Curt Newton, as they stood petrified, came the dreadful realization that he had at last overreached himself.

The Futuremen, in the years they had blazed their adventurous trail across space, had faced many dangerous antagonists. Had faced, and ultimately defeated them. He knew now it had bred overconfidence. It had made him dare pit himself against man's most dangerous foe in all history, against a monstrous survival of elder eons to whom he was but a child.

"It's got Joan," whispered Ezra, his face deathly. "It's got Joan, and there's nothing we can do."

Joan? Not Joan, the dark-faced, shadow-eyed puppet that stood and confronted them. Not Joan's, the taunting words they heard.

"Shall I give you more knowledge, oh men? Shall I tell you more—before I speed back to rejoin my brothers in their war against the human spawn?"

The Linid meant to destroy them, Curt knew. Not from personal malice. But because they were its racial enemies. It meant to destroy them, before it left.

And it could do it, using Joan as its tool. There was only one way to stop it, and that was to break the tool it held.

To kill Joan.

Grag's booming voice came falteringly, as the robot stood rigid with uncertainty. "Chief—what can we do?"

They all recognized the terrible impasse, Curt knew. They knew that only one thing would stop the Linid, and that that was a thing that not even imminent death could make them do.

Raging self-accusation swept Curt. His foolhardiness, his too-great passion to solve cosmic mystery, had brought this end to the Futuremen, and Ezra, and Joan.

He would not let it happen. He would *not*. The old, cold anger, the emotion that was not human fury but a relentless thing learned of his strange tutors long ago, took hold of him.

"Hasten, human!" came the mockery again from Joan's stiff lips. "Speak your questions! For my brothers await me, in the great struggle!"

Two things flashed simultaneously across Curt's mind. One, that the Linid was again speaking to distract them, that in Joan's body it was moving stealthily forward so that it might snatch away their protective jewels and have them completely in its power.

The other thing was a thought that crossed his brain like a thin lightning-flash of wild hope. He had one tiny advantage over the Linid—one only. But he might use it as a weapon.

Not as a physical weapon. No such weapon could harm the Linid without slaying Joan. No, his last weapon was a psychological one.

The Linid meant to destroy them. It could use Joan to do it. His only hope was to divert the Linid from its intention, by psychological attack.

Curt spoke, to that which had been Joan. He said harshly, "Go back then to your brothers, if you can find them! Go back to Andromeda—and rejoice with them at their great victory over man!"

The Linid halted its subtly stealthy movement. It had caught a disturbing something in Captain Future's thought.

"How long do you think you lay frozen beneath the Hall of Ninety Suns?" Curt demanded. "Years? Centuries? No—for ages! And how fared the Linid race in those ages? To victory?

"No, to death! Your brothers perished long and long ago, and are not known in the universe! Not known except for you, the last—the last!"

Contempt and rage flared in the words that came from Joan.

"A lie! You humans could never have won and destroyed my race!"

"Not we humans alone did so—the radiation that was increasingly deadly to them withered them!" Curt retorted swiftly. "The fatal clock of entropy has run far down while you lay frozen!

"Not in this galaxy, nor in Andromeda, nor the galaxies beyond, lives any Linid now but you! I have seen it—the ancient inscriptions of man that tell of the passing of the Linids, the worlds that belonged to your race but are no more theirs. The memorials of man's final victory!"

"Tricks! Lies!" flashed from Joan's lips. "I hold this girl—I hold her brain. her mind, her memories, and in them I can see no such things as you tell."

It was what Captain Future had hoped for, and he instantly pressed his attack.

"She has never seen those things! She has seen but this little System, no more. But *I* have seen—and I can prove all to you."

"The sons of the ape dealt always in falsehood! You cannot prove."

"I can." Curt's face was marble pale. "You can leave the girl and possess *me*—my mind, my memories of what I've seen. You can prove the truth, by that!"

He hung tensely on the answer. It was his only chance, he knew. His only chance to save the girl his own rashness had doomed.

The shadows in Joan's blank eyes swirled—uneasily, disturbedly. He knew he had implanted a terrible doubt in the Linid's mind.

WOULD the creature dismiss that doubt, reject him? He could not believe it. No being who had spoken with such passion and pride of his race could

bear to remain long doubtful of such a dreadful possibility as Curt had affirmed.

Curt laughed, a jarring sound on the bitter silence. Reaching up, he caught the jewel from his head and flung it away, standing forth unarmed. He laughed again, facing the dark peering shadows in Joan's eyes.

"I offer you a stronger weapon against my comrades than the one your hold, and still you are afraid to take it. You are afraid, Linid—to learn the truth!"

"No," whispered the alien voice from Joan's lips. "My people knew not fear."

The subtly distorted outlines of the girl's body began to blur, to flow with the shifting of that strange and awful duality. The veiled and hooded shadow took form around it, swirling yet solid. It lifted—and Joan was free.

She fell, then, with only a small moaning sound to mark her plunge into unconsciousness.

The Linid hovered, and began to move.

Grag's raging bellow shook the rock. The robot took one ponderous forward step, and Otho, his lithe, incredibly agile body bent like a bow for action, leaped beside him. But Simon Wright's incisive voice said sharply,

"Stop! Curtis must do this thing, in his own way."

With a terrible reluctance, Grag and Otho obeyed. They would have given their lives, but in this struggle of two minds for supremacy they could not help.

Captain Future watched the coming of that shape of darkness. And in that moment he knew fear, such as no man had known since the ancient ages when this same battle had been fought across half a universe.

The black veils rippled and widened. The solid shadow covered him, shutting out the light. The heart-core of the Linid gleamed and brooded, a cluster of dark little suns, pulsing, close, very close. The shadowy solidity whipped around him, a cloak, a pall—

It was in him, in his flesh, forcing apart the very atoms of his substance, interlacing them with its own, so that he would have screamed from the unhuman pain of it, only that he had no voice. Their two minds shocked together, and to Curt it was like the bursting of an icy nova in his brain. The cosmos reeled and darkened—

They were one, Curt Newton and the creature out of the gulfs of time.

His mind was open to the Linid—his whole life, everything he had thought and done and seen, forgotten or remembered. And the mind of the Linid, because of that uncanny oneness, was open to him.

Not all the way. Much of it was incomprehensible to any human. It was a tremendously older, stronger mind, so much so that Curt felt a sort of shrinking awe in its presence. It was not an evil mind. Only—different.

Some of its memories he now shared.

The swift free flights along the shores of the dark nebulae, the plunges into ebon vastness beyond the ken of man. The homeplace, the cloudy worlds of mist and cold fire, striding dim and majestic across the universe, dark strangers even in their own cosmos.

The delights of thought, the unfettered strength, the ability to cross the intergalactic spaces naked and alone, learning a chill and vaulting glory from that kinship with the stars.

Above all, the pride and power that carried that race to dominance over all that lived in a hundred far-flung continents of alien suns.

Only glimpses, these. But enough to make Curt's human heart almost stop in wonder.

And now he saw his own memories, coming back to him through the mind of the Linid, as it searched and searched him for the truth.

The dead and empty worlds, the cities without light or sound, the deserted stars. The Hall of Ninety Suns, forgotten shrine of vanished glory, with its inscriptions that spoke solemnly of a war and a species that had ended long ago. Record of death, of defeat, Epitaph of pre-human empire.

The Linid saw, and read.

CURT felt the awfulness of that reading. The pride, the assurance of power, shaken more and more by every scrap of knowledge gleaned from the mind of this small human creature it held so in contempt. The cruel, inexorable coming of realization—the agonized shifting of truth from a concept held through numberless ages to one sprung new-born out of this last hour. *The Linids rule and are great.* Not that, now. *The Linids are gone, and even their name is not remembered.*

Curt felt the moment when the creature ceased to hope.

I am the last. My race is dead, and I am the last!

The terrible, urgent grip on Curt's mind fell away. The crushing alien presence sagged within his flesh, borne down by the weight of truth. It was as though the creature had died.

Curt knew the loneliness of utter desolation.

It seemed an endless period before the Linid stirred again. Slowly, very slowly, like one touched already by the hand of death, the creature withdrew its substance from the body and mind of the man.

It left him, floating free, and now its dusky veils were like funerary cloaks folded sadly around its heart.

With a last flash of ancient pride, the Linid spoke, the words coming strong from the mechanical throat of the interpreter.

"Time, not man, overcame us!"

Curt's limbs were weak. Oddly, now, he no longer felt fear or hatred for the Linid.

There was only a strange pity.

"The battle is over," said the toneless voice. It had now a curious illusion of distance, of withdrawal. "It is over and done. And I am the last of all my race."

The dark veils quivered and swirled, shrouding the creature's core. It seemed to look about it, not at Curt, not at Joan and Ezra and the Futuremen, but at something far beyond. Captain Future sensed that they, with all the human race, had utterly ceased to be important to it.

"I will go back to the birthplace of my people, back to the dark nebula that gave us life. It is fitting that the last of us should there find death."

The cowled shape glided past them. It moved with the somber sureness of fate, unswerving, unhurried, out of the chamber.

Curt and the others watched it go. It crossed the great central room of the laboratory and passed out of sight, into the passage that led upward to the surface of the Moon.

They listened, but they heard no sound of doors.

Joan, who was held now in Grag's arms, still white-faced and dazed, suddenly pointed upward.

"Look," she whispered. "Up there, against the stars—"

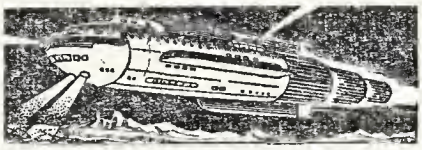
They looked, out through the glassite ceiling-dome. And Curt saw it, the proud creature that had watched the birth of empires and had shared the rule of a thousand suns.

Slowly, majestically, spreading its veils like wings to the windless vault of space, the Linid rose, going outward no man knew where, a dark and lonely shape against infinity.

Curt said somberly, "Somewhere out there, beyond where even *it* is going, is the world of the First-Born that we know now was the birthplace of man—the world that we will never see. But we know."

They stood, the six of them, too full of thought for any speech, watching.

Dark unto dark. And presently the vault of space was empty.



Watch for Further Adventures of CAPTAIN FUTURE in Coming Issues!

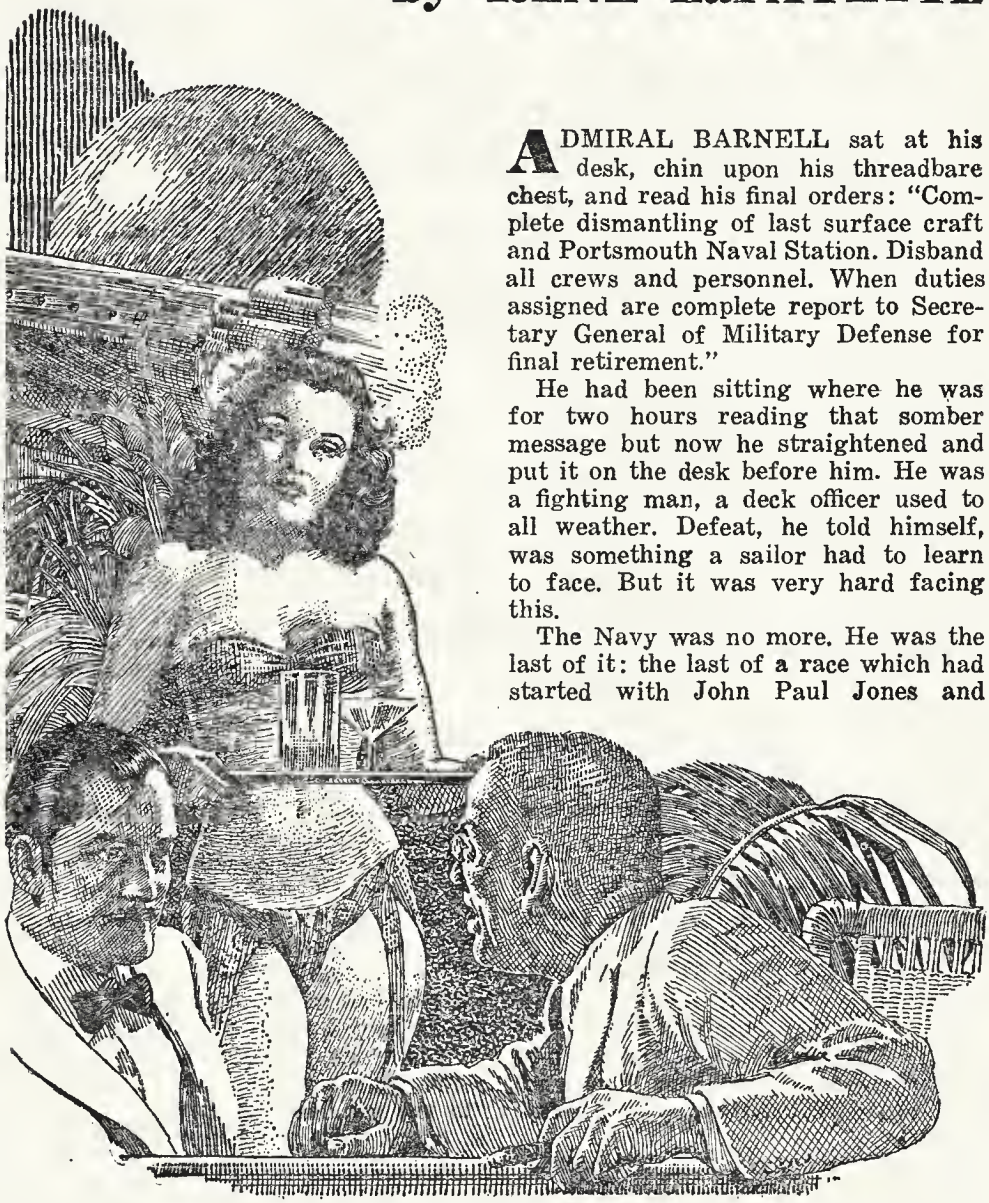
"You may fire when on target," said Admiral Barnell

the LAST ADMIRAL

They scrapped the Navy, and they told old Admiral Barnell he was through—but even these politicians of the future should have known you can't teach an old space dog ***new tricks!***

A Story in the Series on the Conquest of Space

by RENE LaFAYETTE



ADMIRAL BARNELL sat at his desk, chin upon his threadbare chest, and read his final orders: "Complete dismantling of last surface craft and Portsmouth Naval Station. Disband all crews and personnel. When duties assigned are complete report to Secretary General of Military Defense for final retirement."

He had been sitting where he was for two hours reading that somber message but now he straightened and put it on the desk before him. He was a fighting man, a deck officer used to all weather. Defeat, he told himself, was something a sailor had to learn to face. But it was very hard facing this.

The Navy was no more. He was the last of it: the last of a race which had started with John Paul Jones and

Biddle. He was the last admiral, as David Glasgow Farragut had been the first. It was hard to take, hard to be the last man to be piped over the side of a gleaming man-of-war, hard to know that after him the traditions of the blue and gold were dead.

He stood up and pulled his boat cloak from the rack and wrapped it around him. The offices were empty as it was late, but the sight of these desks chilled him with their bare expanses, clean of all work. These desks would be serving tailors and bonfires in another week.

He went into the yard, walking slowly over the wet and grimy cobblestones, holding his boat cloak up against the steady rain which drummed on Portsmouth. He should have gone home but he did not and wandered instead down toward the fingers of light which reached to him across the water from the town. The docks were deserted. Half a dozen men-of-war, all but one of them decommissioned and all of them scheduled for scrap, lay in their berthings, silent, gloomy in the downpour.

These were the last ships: a cruiser, three submarines, a tanker and an old destroyer, unseaworthy and eaten up with rust, foul with barnacles and salt rime. Soon they would be ships no more but twisted metal plates at so much the pound.

"An indulgence of a sentimental and conservative society," General of the Air Gonfallon had called this ghost of a navy, and Admiral Barnell, sitting in the dark and rain stirred uneasily as he remembered those words. They had somehow included himself yet he was only fifty-four.

THE scene of the final hearings rose before him out of the mists. The politicians, the generals, and only himself from the Navy. The lofty, grating patronage of them had eaten into him deeply. They humored him. They laughed "understandingly" about his "hobby" and they cut the Navy off from all appropriation of any kind whatever.

He had faced them then like a baggered old sea lion. "You tell me," he had said, "that the day of navies is done, that man has transferred all his fighting techniques to the air! I want to remind you, gentlemen, that there is yet another arena of battle about which you have no thought. The Army has placed satellites spinning around Earth to guard her from illegal atomic manufacture. Airplanes can land in any weather and carry any troops to any scene of action in a matter of hours. But, gentlemen, there is this one thing on which you have not thought: space."

They had looked at him with pleasant smiles. They could understand the reluctance of a "battleship admiral" to see his service vanish forever from the eyes of men. A few words from him could do no harm; he was entitled to say them, of course.

"Two hundred years ago," he continued, "the Navy attempted to carry out a project of a voyage to the Moon. Private researches and Army jealousies forestalled that effort; but it was naval research data which actually made space flight possible. You are entered now upon a period of space conquest. Every few weeks explorational expeditions return from the stars to tell us of even wider horizons for man. Daily, exploitational vessels put out from our major spaceports. And five major colonies have been planted on as many planets. The significance of these things should not be lost upon you.

"Far colonies mean commerce. Commerce will come to mean piracy. The day is already over when the mere fact of being a space voyageur makes one a noble hero. There are lawless elements already adrift amongst the far planets and there will come a time when these constitute a real menace to our expansion into the stars."

They heard him out. After all, the old gentleman had a right to say his say. After all, he was losing a good job.

"I wonder if any one of you have given any thought," continued Barnell, "to the problems incident to warfare in space. And yet those problems are complex and in need of solution. An air-

plane, even a stratosphere airplane, is one thing. A space vessel is quite another. A service which has the somewhat hit-or-miss experience of piloting aircraft of various small sizes is entirely and completely incapable of appreciating the problems of manning, handling and controlling space craft.

"Gentlemen, a space man-of-war is essentially no different from a large submarine. It is not and will not be a gigantic aircraft, up for a few hours or days and then back to solid ground again. Sloppy discipline, lack of routine and bad morale are relatively unimportant to aircraft. But in a space man-of-war we will have to return to the days of Nelson to discover the means of keeping crews in close confinement, in strict and alert obedience for possible years at a time.

"Have you ever thought of planetary blockade? I think not. Have you ever conceived the mathematics necessary to space gunnery where one ship's speed combined with its opponent's may amount to hundreds of light speeds? I think not.

"A man-of-war is essentially a gun platform. She is devoted to seeking and destroying enemies, to blockading and to punishing whole communities. She is a vibrant life force in herself and is not only a complicated mechanism of machinery but also a complicated and intricate problem in humanity.

"If you, gentlemen, with your aircraft, your infantry and your space transports can solve these problems, then I willingly abandon this fight for my service. But you have not solved them, gentlemen. And there will come a time when the very existence of Earth itself will depend upon the learning and tradition which has now its last repository in a service you are disbanding—the United States Navy."

They smiled and the chairman thanked him. And they cut off the last appropriation. And sitting here in the dark and rain with the final orders like an ache in his mind, old Admiral Barnell knew how much he had failed. But he was failing not only himself. He was failing the few hundred bright young officers and technicians and the few thousand men who remained. He was failing John Paul and Farragut. And he was failing Earth.

HE was stiff and cold when he rose. Tomorrow he would have to brace into the last task. He had better go home and get some rest. He had dismissed his aide earlier with his car and he went down to the gate to find a cab. The two marines in the box, apprehensive and sensing the doom which was overtaking their proud service in common with the Navy, hurriedly stood to attention while the corporal of the guard ducked across the street to the cab stand.

The old admiral stood, unseeing, beside the guardroom table, steadying himself with one hand. He felt strangely ill. The evening paper was under his fingers where the corporal had hastily dropped it. To distract himself from the way the room had sought to tip he looked fixedly at the headlines.

COLONY BLOWN UP

Johnsonville on Twain
Destroyed

Expedition Reports
Disaster

Barnell shook his head sadly and was about to put the paper away from him when the text caught his eye:

"According to the expedition commander, the attack must have come from outer space. The 116th Cavalry post and the 96th Anti-Aircraft battery were evidently unwarned and the majority of the soldiers were found in the ruins of their buildings. The entire area was still radioactive and Expeditionary Engineer Martin Thomas expressed the opinion that a crude order of atomic fission had been used, such as plutonium. The planes of the Twain continental patrol were still in their hangars.

"Discounting all possibility of alien invaders, pointing out that foodstuffs

and equipment which would be known and useful only to men had been looted and that the wealth of Johnsonville radium had been the evident goal of the raiders, Extra-Terrestrial Secretary Sime warned against panic. 'Earth,' he said, 'is amply and adequately protected against such raids and has been for the past century. There has been no relaxation of the atomic defense organizations nor will there be. This is obviously the work of some anti-social group of men who have possessed themselves of the means for one raid. We do not expect any repetition. I have asked the army to send relief transports and further garrison to these invaluable possessions. . . .'"

Barnell had been holding the paper closer and closer to his face as he read. Now he thrust it from him with an anger which tore it. At that moment the corporal of the guard, startled by the expression on the admiral's face and the sound of the paper, stood stiffly to attention.

"Your cab, sir."

"Confound the cab! No, keep it there. Where's your phone? Where's your phone?" He snatched it off the desk and called the civil airfield.

The Navy had no planes now, having long since lost them to the Air Command of the Department of Military Defense. But his quarterdeck voice brought the admiral a civilian plane on charter in less than a minute. He rang again and futilely fumed into the mouthpiece at aides who disappeared when they were needed. Leaving orders for Lieutenant Mandville to follow him as soon as possible, he got into the cab, headed for the airport. Ten minutes later he was roaring upward through the rain toward the nation's capital.

Washington received him coolly. It had no time at the moment for admirals. Officialdom was trying to press into service transport by which to send to outflung colonies the means of defending themselves against raids and was discovering that whereas spaceships could carry men and animals and baggage with ease, the number of ships available which could transport a 10,000 ton psi-screen dynamo was exactly none.

Old Admiral Barnell spent what he considered three precious hours trying to catch Extra-Terrestrial Sime. Cooling his heels in that gentleman's office put Barnell in no mood for further attempts. He took himself on an even more complicated search, the discovery of Defense Secretary Montgrove.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon before Admiral Barnell could finally lay a few salvos across the desk at this florid politician. Montgrove had been distractedly cordial at first greeting but that had cooled quickly when the admiral's proposal was only half stated.

"My dear sir," interrupted Montgrove, "you fail to realize that you have not, in all your organization, one man competent to pilot and navigate a space vessel. Further, there is no existing appropriation—"

Barnell exploded. "Confound the appropriations! Are you not aware, sir, that out there somewhere is a condemned, cowardly crew, a pirate, sir, a condemned pirate! And since when, in all the annals of time, can you find where the army has run down pirates? You can't, sir. I defy you to, sir. And all the anti-attack forces in the world, mounted around the colonies will not do more than protect the immediate confines of some town. Sir, you don't understand the situation. It is beyond you, sir. And *I* am going beyond you, sir. I am going to the president by right of national security. Forbid me to see him, sir. I defy you to forbid me!"

Montgrove had been raised a ward heeler for all his bluster. He folded fast before the noble rage of old Barnell and was heard to utter a relieved "Whew!" when that officer had gone his angry way.

BUT the president, like all presidents, had "entrusted these matters to competent authority and reliable men" and "disliked to interfere with the duties of his departments."

"You have no department with that duty, Mr. President," said old Barnell. "I respectfully ask you to call any or all of your departments to discover whether or not there is a single effort afoot to patrol planets in outer space or even to perform that most vital function, the seeking out and shooting into splinters, sir, shooting into splinters of that condemned pirate!"

"There has never been an occasion," said the president, "to delegate such a duty, but I am sure the Department of Air has some thought for this."

"Call them!" demanded Barnell.

The call was made and then several calls. And at last, with a puzzled look on his face, the president stared at the old admiral.

"They hadn't," he said slowly, "thought of it. Not until just now. I—" His phone rang and he picked it up, talked for a moment and looked relieved. "Well," he said, brightening, "I was wrong. The Army is going to man a transport and send it out looking."

"A what?" cried Barnell.

"Why, a transport. One of their troopcraft. I imagine—"

"Mr. President," said the admiral, "since time immemorial the Army has had troop transports. And since the first day they got them the Navy has been pulling them off rocks and convoying them through danger."

"But you have no crews. You have no competent navigators—"

And now Admiral Barnell could smile craggily. "Mr. President, in the past hundred and some years we have had very little work for our officers. We were called the idle service and the burden on the public purse. So we have been happy to loan officers to private enterprises." He leaned forward in triumph. "Thirty percent of the membership roll of the Explorers' Club is composed of naval officers or ex-naval officers. Navigation, sir, is the Navy's strong forte! I have the men!"

This was a stopper to objection. But only for a moment. "My dear admiral, even if, as you say, naval officers have been commanding private expeditions for a very long time into space, there is still the matter of a ship. I am sure your sea vessels cannot cope with space, and I am equally sure that funds could not be made available in so short a time to purchase such a ship—"

"Mr. President, what are those things which whir past Washington every day hundreds of miles out? Sir, they are satellites."

"But satellites! Good heavens! They've been abandoned for these many years. Just the other day the Army engineers were debating whether or not it was worthwhile to salvage them. They decided that until they were proved a serious menace to navigation they should remain—"

"I want those satellites!" said Barnell. "The Army put them out there a couple of hundred years ago. There is no corrosion in space. They have never served any purpose whatever. Now I want them."

"But what could you possibly do with them?"

"A naval vessel is a gun platform. I've got the guns. I've got guns that will shoot charge enough to destroy a town five hundred miles away. But they need a platform—"

"This is going to take money," said the president, getting confused.

"I have several old naval bases, two navy yards and a few ships to sell for scrap. I can raise a hundred and ninety million dollars in twenty-four hours and use it if you will direct that all naval property be struck off as expended."

"Isn't that a war measure?"

"This is war," said old Barnell. And he so thoroughly looked it that by six he was in the one remaining office the Navy had left in the Defense Building, burning phone wires, authority gripped in a big, seamanlike hand.

And outside the window a newsboy was hawking his wares with, "Mines on Ballerdice Raided! Five hundred Dead in New Disaster! Army despatching forces to stop space raider. Read all about it!"

Barnell didn't care to read. From the files he had records of thirteen officers, engineers, ordnance men, former expedition men and electronics experts. And by long distance they were replying to his barked commands, "Aye, aye, sir. Right away, sir."

Manville, the aide, a harassed young man, entered, already briefed by the old chief yeoman in the outer office, somewhat stunned by all this activity in a place which had slept for generations.

"Any orders, sir?" said Mandville.

"Yes!" barked Barnell. "Get the chief of supplies and accounts and start him unloading naval property and have him grab up, commandeer if necessary, every scrap of space equipment on the continent not already in Army hands. Get recruiting to grab, press gang if necessary, every space mechanic they can find. Tell hydrographic to collect all the space charts they can locate. And have ordnance down at Portsmouth start getting ready to receive Commander Stapleton tomorrow when he goes down to break out guns!"

"Will that be all, sir?"

"Oh, yes. Have somebody bring me in some dinner. On the double."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

The United States Navy had begun to move into space.

DURING the ensuing days, while the newspapers unknowingly played up Army relief attempts and civilian experts offered sage opinions on how to make a colony safe, Admiral Barnell and a frantic staff scooped together the ingredients of the first space battleship. It would be cumbersome and uncomfortable and it would never be able to land anywhere. But it could carry guns—missile atom guns and lots of them.

In their files they had found the design, drawn by a naval architect long since dead, of an "ideal" space dreadnaught. It had features which they could not even approximate, not for lack of technology but for lack of time. Appended to that drawing were a series of comments which had followed its publication in a magazine after the Navy had smiled on it. Chief amongst those comments was one which hurt.

"Who would be so stupid as to drain the public treasuries for the construction of such a useless monstrosity? It cannot carry freight. Its two hundred and fifty man crew would be useless in any construction project. Its bases would place undesirable population in the vicinity of our colonies—"

They could not build that battleship. They could not even attempt it. But it had several features which they used. Its principles were sound. A space man-of-war would have to be able to depart from any course and assume new courses hurriedly. This meant "sidewheeler" drives which were mounted in turrets like guns and which could be swung in any direction, imparting, without upsetting the ship itself, new courses. Four such drives were instantly begun—exterior enginerooms to be fitted in a girdle around a hull.

The next principle was conservation of air in event of hits, which meant intricate compartmentation. The satellites had this but they planned to double it.

The next principle was steady gravity. An electronically inclined commander, by a simple device, tuned the ordinary gravity circuits to the engine throttles so that all acceleration would be attended by proper resetting of gravity, a thing which would keep men comfortable and, more important, would make for steadiness at the guns.

Another principle was the ordnance recoil adjuster which operated to adjust automatically the turret engines each time hits upset the speed and direction of the vessel.

A detector arrangement was developed and built in two hectic days which, using fifth order magnetism, instantly located anything within four light years and trained the guns upon it.

They stripped twenty cargo vessels, hurriedly commandeered, of their drives to fit up the four turrets. They gutted

them of gear. They compounded their meteor force screens into a kind of force armor. Then, in a mad scramble, they loaded all they had in the twelve freighters they had charted and roared out in a ragged flotilla to intercept the first satellite. Out of the eight satellites available, Commander Simpson had chosen this one in an initial scout. But even so its long, disused condition made the Navy men heavy of heart when they grappled to its sides and boarded.

These satellites had been built by dumping materiel in orbit and then assembling it in space at the speed of twenty-five thousand miles an hour. It had been quite a feat at the time—two hundred years before. The engineer and spotting crews, alert for atomic work below, had idly rebuilt the interiors now and then so that little of the original was as it had been planned.

Nevertheless, despite the ragged and insecure bulkheads, the ancient metal, the fouled oxygen machinery and a hundred other drawbacks, Admiral Barnell tackled the work with a fury before which anything would have surrendered.

Bluejackets in space suits swarmed over the old satellite, burning and welding, fitting and throwing away. For some thousand years or more before that ancient time sailors had carried well the repute of getting things done. And their ingenuity was displayed now in a hundred ways.

For two weeks, living aboard the grappled freighters which remained while the balance ferried up new materials, officers and men hammered away at the satellite. And then, out there in the absolute zero of space, unattended by throngs or bands, old Admiral Barnell and his bluejackets cracked a bottle of champagne across her hitherto unchristened bows and blazoned upon her nose in red lead the scrawled name, "U.S.S. Constitution."

A brief pause of pride and a few shy grins to hide emotion and that weary, grimy lot heaved aboard her supplies, pulled her throttles and broke her out of the orbit which she had followed for two centuries as a hulk.

Old Ironsides did not at first lend herself to man-of-war routine. She was crude, cold and uncomfortable. Her "Officers' Country" was a ledge of bunks with no springs just abaft her bridge. Crew's berthing was anywhere a man could find to put his blankets down and not get stepped on. The galley for the first week consisted of burning torches aimed precariously at coffee pots. Her battle stations were wherever a man thought he should be when action came.

But there was Navy about her. Not just in the dungarees and the lace on the officers' dirty caps. Boatswain's pipes peepled and shrilled through her and commands were received with a cheery aye, aye. Where she was going now, heading out well over ten light speeds and building up, up, up with every hour under the able hands of her conning officers, was known only to her captain and Admiral Barnell.

HER captain, "Ten-Ike Mike" McGranger had received his orders in a brisk, brief quarterdeck snap and he was obeying them. He was a full captain and the veteran of five space expeditions on loan to the Explorers' Club and he had ten officers who had tasted space before.

"Sir," said Admiral Barnell, "you will head in the general direction of Twain with all speed and there rendezvous with supply vessels. You will not, under any circumstances, contemplate the landing of this ship anywhere since I conceive that battleships, to be effective, must be big enough to fight and that's too big to handle alongside a planet. You will keep all detectors alert and report any other craft. And you will hold the usual drill and general quarters to fit the men for their duties. The ship is yours. I shall not interfere. Carry on."

And the days narrowed their distance to destination. Old Admiral Barnell stayed cooped up in his cabin with mounds of space charts. All they saw of him was his aide, his yeoman and his steward.

They came to quarters twice each day. They held battle practice. And worked out their various bills for fire and damage control. But no one even tried to figure out how one would go about abandoning ship. That would be something to think about when the time came.

They held target practice with their batteries and coordinated their fire so that, by the time they had held five drills they could pick off a meteor or bit of dust at six thousand miles with a considerable air of confidence. With all formulae relating to gravity not counting, with their missile projectors unimpeded by air, they were finding that their sea weapons had surprising potentialities. The proximity fuses they managed to stretch so that a mile miss was a clear hit. And well before the rendezvous was reached they had screens so rigged that a fifteen thousand mile salvo could be fired with an accuracy of three hits out of ten shots.

They reached Twain and had to wait two days for their supply vessels which, however tardily, finally came up. The assorted cargoes were insuffcent in many instances and failed to fill up the lists which department officers had anxiously and hopefully made of things they could use. One set of drives had soured and they gutted a freighter to get another.

Admiral Barnell, in a fast gig he had had made en route, went down to Johnsonville to see what they faced.

He came back grim and tired. They piped him in through the airlock and he stiffly returned the salutes of the sideboys. To Captain Ten-Ike Mike he said:

"All officers in wardroom country, sir."

When they were there he sat at the head of the green-covered board, head sunk on his chest, looking tired and old.

They waited quietly until he told them to sit down and then Ten-Ike said, "Things pretty tough down there, sir?"

Old Admiral Barnell raised hot eyes to the *Constitution's* captain. "Sir, you are not old enough to recall the last atom war. I myself was a boy. But Johnsonville is old Chicago again. Dead."

The officers waited. Barnell brushed the ugly scene from his eyes. "They were attacked without warning from outer space. The missiles were probably fired from six or eight hundred miles. Eighteen thousand men, women and children are down there—cooked."

Faces grew hard around the board and the younger officers fidgeted, anxious to slash out to a new destination and come to grips with an enemy.

Barnell looked at them. "I understand your feelings, gentlemen. Atomic war was theoretically banished forever from Earth. It was 'banished forever' five times. And now it's out here in the stars. It means that every small community, every mine and trading post amongst the planets is open to attack. Gold doesn't burn. Radium and uranium aren't affected. And while there is greed among men, these things will continue to happen—unless we are successful in this initial quest. I do not need to remind you, gentlemen, that the life term of our service is short. This will be the end of the road unless we succeed. Naval tradition has been fully ten thousand years in building. If we vanish as a service, there will be none to undertake this task of guarding space. There is more at stake here than Johnsonville, gentlemen, although heaven knows, that's enough.

"Have any of you looked at space charts? Some of you are old hands in absolute zero. Most of you are not. But all of you realize, I think, the immensity of space. There are literally millions of stars within a few hundred light years of this point and thousands upon thousands of habitable planets. We do not have much time for several reasons. Have any of you any suggestions as to how we should locate and destroy the perpetrators of this crime?"

THEY had several suggestions. And after listening to them a few minutes, the old admiral nodded.

"You are all too right in that we work under enormous difficulties," he said. "We have invented insufficent technologies, we have a battleship that doesn't dare touch ground anywhere, lacking chemical jets and proper stress analysis. We have no intelligence force in operation and we have no escorts. But we have some advantages, gentlemen. We are on the scene and we have good guns and brave men.

"Commander Thorpe, I am assigning you to the command of the freighter *Gaston*. Mount one of our spare missile racks in her bows and take her crew and twenty men from this vessel. I am commissioning the *Gaston* as a cruiser. You will proceed to Radioville on Carnova Bear. On arrival you will ground and search all space vessels for any of the goods which might have come from here and for all suspicious characters. Act with a high-hand even if the Army tries to stop you: there is no defined authority in space.

"Lieutenant Carter, I appoint you—"

He spoke for twenty minutes and at the end of that time the only experienced space officer he had left was Captain Ten-Ike. The others had been given the freighters, newly created "cruisers," and various destinations in space.

"Gentlemen," he told them as they stood up to leave, "you are a scout force. You are poorly manned, undergunned and may well be in dangerous situations. The merchant ships which you are using are badly fitted for their tasks. But those tasks are important. You must procure intelligence as to the whereabouts of a raider base and protect at all costs the planets and colonies to which you have been assigned. You are empowered to act with complete discretion to achieve these ends. And you are reminded that upon you and your judgment rests not only the future of our service but the safety of all commerce throughout space. That will be all."

The designated ten officers took their caps and filed out. And then Barnell looked at Ten-Ike.

"Now whip the rest of these people into top desk watch officers, Captain. By trial of arms and the taking of prizes they may be commanding vessels of their own before this year is out."

It was ambitious. But that it was nearly hopeless old Admiral Barnell dared not think. What he had seen on Johnsonville had told him that the enemy was powerful. Very powerful. Johnsonville had been heavily protected by a major action force screen, a thing he had not known, by six batteries of excellent area defense weapons and by adequate warning systems. Yet, even though she had been commanded by an Army colonel whom Barnell knew by repute to be astute and alert, Johnsonville had fallen like a card house before a hurricane.

The enemy they faced was ruthless, well-informed and greedy. *And he had bigger and better guns.*

During the next watches the old admiral paced the bridge, pausing from time to time to watch units of his newly commissioned flotilla, weirdly silver in the bright blaze of Mizar and backed by the absolute black of space, depart upon their missions. He had left one freighter and one passenger craft, the first to service him and the other to carry the marine expeditionary force of two companies which had tardily arrived. He didn't like to think how undermanned was the *Constitution* now or how she would fare with inexperienced deck officers. Instead he indulged himself in hope that one of his scouts would bring him intelligence and that he could soon close for action.

With only his two remaining vessels beside his flag, he turned to his orderly.

"My compliments to the commanding officer and he will get underway immediately for Rangerton of Beta Centauris."

There, he thought to himself, in that welter of outcast humanity and amid the pooled riches of six planets he could most likely find 1. vital information and 2. men to replenish his crews. And he would be in the hub of the wheel he was scouting, ready to strike in any direction.

The big craft began to shudder under the impetus of drives. They were getting underway.

But Admiral Barnell need not have been quite so impatient for news. Less than one week later the battle circuit opened up with a message from Lieutenant Carter commanding the *Miami.*

INTERCEPTED BY HOSTILE CRAFT AND FIRED UPON. AM REPLYING. EVIDENTLY OUTRANGED . . . ATTEMPTING TO CLOSE . . . SEEM TO BE . . .

That was the end of the message. No further word of any kind ever came from the *Miami.*

CAPTAIN ALONZO SCHMIDT sprawled on a rug in the shade of a large rock and watched his shipfitters patch up the gap in the keel of the *Guerra.* To hand was a gallon of lemonade liberally spiked and served up by a girl scantily clothed.

"Ach, Emanuel! What nonsense, Emanuel," said Schmidt. "Some expedition with naval men loaned. You haf heard of such. Ach, such worryings. No wonder you are anemic!"

Emanuel, a dandified little Argentinian, a full Spaniard unlike Schmidt whose people had come to the country only a couple centuries before, dabbed daintily at his forehead. He found more than the rays of Aldeberan hot this day. He was a very brave man. But he was cautious.

"But they have never carried guns before," he protested.

"Ach, pop-guns. Shooting corks! So they haf heard of trouble in space and they mount pop-guns. Darling, more lemonade."

"They fired remarkably well," said Emanuel. "And I myself saw the bodies in the debris. They were naval officers and men. United States."

"What would they be doing in space, now? Hein? What? Just some private expedition that wanted to fight."

"I didn't see a single piece of expedition equipment," said Emanuel.

"Ach, worrying. Always it gives worryings. Besides, we outranged him at least ten thousand miles. My little darlings. My own poppets. They shoot so sweet, ya!"

"Admitted your people have a flair for invention," said Emanuel. "You've practically taken over our whole country with them. But . . ."

"Ya," said Schmidt, suddenly dark, "and they kick the best of us out because we are too smart. But never mind, Emanuel. Someday we go home. We make a big colony, a big navy and we go home. And we take what we want, ya?"

"I think we ought to quit for a while," said Emanuel. "Besides we require people for our project and all I have seen so far is murder for baubles. We should stay right here and build up our ships with what we have already. It is risky. Our guns are good. Our technicians good. We will soon be able to return and do what we wish with Earth. But that ship last month, it worries me. Naval officers, naval crew. And no equipment."

"Bah, my chicken-livered friend," said Schmidt, "you get goose bumps in any zephyr, ya? Didn't we shoot him to pieces? Was there enough left to bury? Could we even salvage that old tub? No. Well—"

"She had 'Miami' painted in red lead on her bow. I saw it. The United States Navy used to name ships after towns and Miami is a town."

"Bah. She's dead. They're all dead. Forget it. Two-three days we get word from Don Alvaro about Rangerton and back to work we go again. I hear it is heavy with gold shipments. Nice, yellow gold." And he chuckled in sheer good nature and reached toward the girl.

* * * * *

Admiral Barnell sat on a packing box in an office the marines had tossed together for him on the outskirts of Rangerton. His five star flag hung limply in the blazing breath of Beta Centauri. The khaki of the sentries outside was black with sweat.

The man between the two intelligence j.g.'s was also sweating but it was not from heat. Water dripped from his palms and ran from his brow into his

eyes. He had a frantic air about him and he kept twitching his head as though to get it out of a vice.

"Now let's be calm about it," said Barnell. "We do not intend to torture you—"

"I've had no food or water!" whimpered Don Alvaro Mendoza. "I'm dying of uncertainty. That's torture enough!"

"Pirates," said the old admiral, "I think we hang in chains to dry. That's right, isn't it, Colbright?"

Colbright, a clever young officer, nodded brightly. It was he who had spread the report of rich shipments while pretending drunkenness and had brought Don Alvaro prying down upon him.

"Of course we try them first," he added. "*Unless* they tell what they know *when* it is some use to us."

"But the Army post never bothered me! What are you doing here? This is a nightmare!" cried Don Alvaro. "What is the Navy doing here?"

"Protecting commerce, guaranteeing the freedom of space and just now," said Barnell, "questioning a renegade and a thief. You are an Argentinian. You admit you are descended from the Germans who migrated there. You admit you were thrown out of the country about ten years ago for plotting its overthrow. Now tell us where your friends keep their ships."

Don Alvaro went white. He could see Schmidt smiling while he flogged a man to death. He could see Schmidt shooting a traitor, wounding him here and there. He could see Schmidt sticking a seaman's hand out of the airlock into space and then bringing him in to knock the frozen member off like a piece of glass. He began to sweat harder.

"The difference is," said Barnell acutely, "that you are in our hands. How far away is your leader?"

"Sir, I don't think he'll talk," said Colbright. "I have his code. I'll just send a message to space at large that he has told all. That will save a lot of trouble."

With a thin scream Don Alvaro leaped back. "No!" he said, chattering with fear. "No! I'll tell you. This is the next place of raid. They'll be here in five days. Capitan Schmidt is the leader. We intended to build up a fleet and attack the Argentine, using Schmidt's developments. Now the base—"

THE *Guerra* sailed down toward Rangerton. It was a bright afternoon there, rewarding his calculations. It would make gunnery simple. Good Don Alvaro. Schmidt trusted his friend had wit enough to stay clear of the firing area. Rangerton would make a good haul in metal and perhaps there would be two or three ships at the spaceport.

The planet looked pretty, he thought, as his detectors sought the concentration of metal which would train him dead on the town. This was his fifth attack on such places and he felt very sure of himself. The Army had nothing which could worry him and these persistent rumors about naval vessels were so much beer froth. Nobody had guns which could touch him. Nobody. Hadn't his own people shown him how to make guns? And did anyone else know? They'd brought all that from Germany a long time ago

[*Turn page*]

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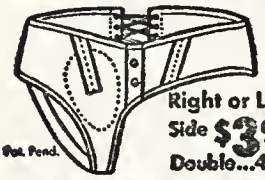

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at the end of some lost and forgotten war. There. He was just about dead center. Now—

"Capitan!" said Emanuel. "There's a ship!"

"Ah, more for the pot. Let him land and we'll—"

"No, no," said Emanuel, excitedly, staring into the screen. "It is coming toward us, about thirty thousand miles, closing fast. A small ship. A freighter. Very fast. Twenty-one thousand—nineteen thousand—sixteen thousand—"

The *Guerra* bucked under an impact and Schmidt reeled at his station. In a sudden fury he trained his guns and pressed all firing trips. The *Guerra* rolled as her course shifted and the planet was lost for an instant. Then there was a bright blaze in the sky off to port, a blaze which had bursts in it.

"Hit him!" said Emanuel. "He's done for. But I don't like it. He almost did for us. Our steering jets are ruined!"

"Ya, got him," said Schmidt, all cheers again. "What a pretty lot of fire. Emanuel, I am a gunner. Now we change course with the main drives and get back to business."

ADMIRAL BARNELL'S face was grim and hard as he stood, hands jammed angrily in his pockets, on his bridge, glaring at the sputtering fire which was all that remained of Commander Thorpe's *Gaston*. But it had served. It had clearly served. And swooping up from the protection of a low moon, drives all out, the *Constitution* was cutting down the range. "Eighteen thousand miles, sir," said the rangefinder.

"Captain," said old Admiral Barnell, "you may fire when on target."

A moment later the *Constitution* was shaken by a blast. A damage control circuit clanged shut, isolating the hit. A minute and a half later the *Constitution* shrilled with the whistle of launching missiles.

There was a sharp crash abaft the bridge and the emptiness around the ship blazed furiously. She bucked again under a second salvo. Damage control circuits began to close swiftly. A strained voice somewhere said, "Number Four Engine Room gone."

The shrill of a third salvo screamed through the ship. The starboard side dissolved in sparks and melting metal.

"Put on your space helmet, sir," said Mandville. "Pressure's dropping in here. We're bad hit starboard."

Barnell did not need a detector now to see the *Guerra*. The range was closed to forty miles. All drives were furiously backing and the quartermasters were trying to swing the *Guerra* alongside.

Point-blank the *Constitution* let go a salvo from her remaining guns. And then Barnell saw what was wrong. A force screen of an advanced design blocked most of the impact of their proximity shells.

"Stand by to ram!" he barked.

The quartermasters hesitated for a brief second, automatically waiting for their captain to relay. But Ten-Ike was dead on the cold steel deck and the after bulkhead was in flames.

The helm jets strained, turning into the *Guerra's* force screen. The drives shuddered in their turrets. They were inside the *Guerra's* shooting range and now at three miles any salvo hitting them would also destroy the *Guerra*.

The quartermasters looked white-faced at the looming side of the *Guerra*. They were coming fast, too fast. The turrets bucked harder in an effort to hold down the impact.

Mandville snatched tight the old admiral's helmet strap and then fell himself, choking with fumes of metal turning into gas.

They crashed. There was a fiery fanfare of sparks as metal sawed through metal. Plates buckled. The bridge glass curved, almost stood the strain and then flicked into splinters.

Air whistled out of the *Guerra* in a dying gasp. Shattered bow into rent side, they were tangled in death.

An ensign and two sailors burst through the melted compartment wall, glanced hurriedly over the bodies on the bridge and snatched Barnell from the wreckage. They stepped out into space,

out of the inferno which was licking through both vessels and fought free.

The ships did four circuits of the planet before they crashed. It was long enough for the *Memphis* to take off thirty wounded from the *Constitution* and two sailors from the *Guerra*. They found old Admiral Barnell and the three who had rescued him. Admiral Barnell was dying. His chest had been crushed.

But the old man's dying injunction was messaged back to Earth and has come down to us in our distant time in the form of Article Ten, Naval Regulations, governing the conduct of officers:

> There will be times, as there have been, when political or economic concerns seek to handicap the initiative and performance of duty of officers. It must at all times be remembered that lawless and self-seeking elements among men must be curbed by strong and effective action, often extraordinary in scope and that whosoever threatens duty or the means to perform it threatens also the security and therefore the existence of mankind. No measure taken, no matter how far beyond the call of duty, which tends to secure to mankind the advantages of safe commerce should be censured in any officer or man.
>
> To the army belongs the planets. To the air departments belong their atmospheres. But only to a navy and its officers can belong the outer marches of absolute zero, the depth, the length and breadth in all their infinity, of space.

Provided with guns from the *Guerra's* base, equipped with new knowledge and technologies, supported by generous appropriations from an appreciative nation and heralded everywhere by popular demonstrations, the United States Navy, within two years, was competently discharging its duties in space. And after it and securely founded upon its practices came the United Continents Navy, the Earth Navy, the Confederated Planets Navy and through a host of others to our own time when the Intergalactic Department of the Navies regulates for us our own commerce and keeps for us peace amongst the hundred million worlds.

Old Admiral Barnell, sleeping in his tomb at Annapolis in the Earth National Monument of Mankind, must sleep very peacefully and content.

A Heritage of Wizardry Thrusts William Wilson into a Strange Dilemma when Priscilla, a Beautiful Sorceress from the Seventeenth Century, Takes Control of His Mind in—

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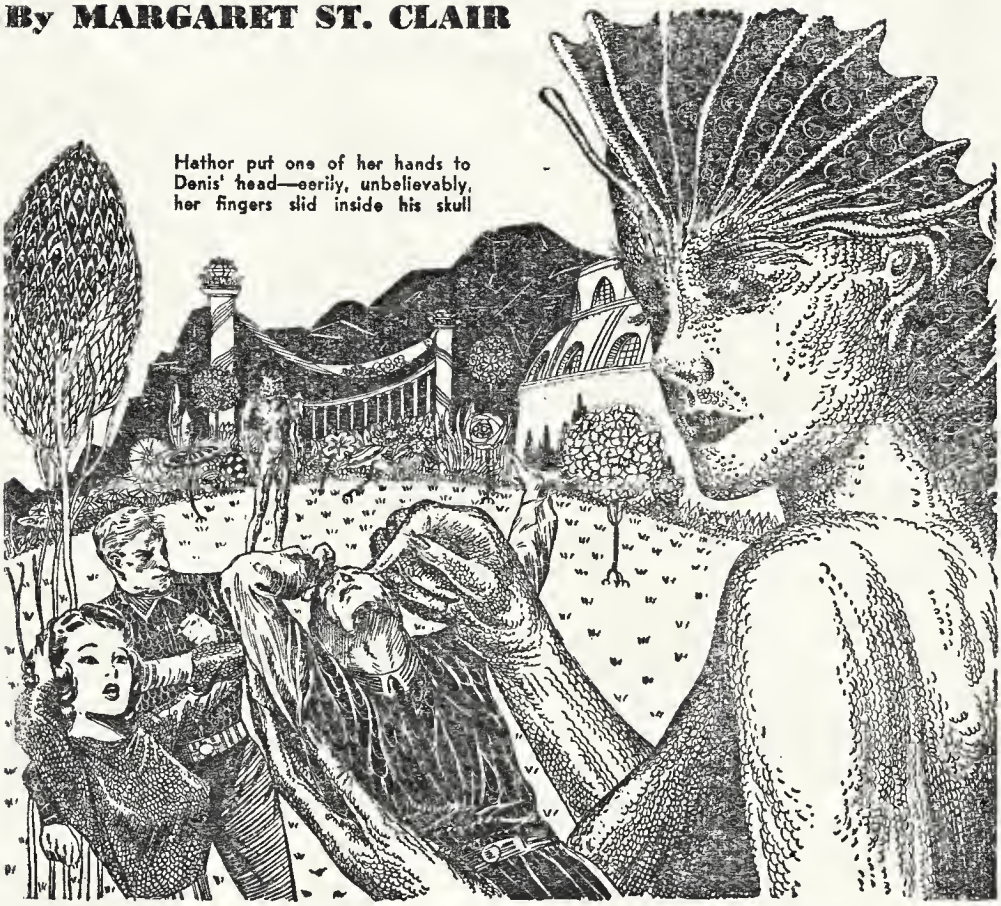


Hathor put one of her hands to Denis' head—eerily, unbelievably, her fingers slid inside his skull

HATHOR'S PETS

Hathor treated the party kindly—but had unanswerable weapons to employ when they began to act like people!

"I WON'T have my baby born here among a lot of lizards!" Vela said passionately. "I just won't! Henry, you've got to help us get out of here!"

Henry Pettit sighed. Would it do any good to try to tell his sister again that Hathor and her fifteen-foot congeners were not lizards? No, it would not. Vela was never very logical and the fact that she had violated the cult of feminine delicacy sufficiently to mention her coming child to him showed how excited she was. Arguing with her in this mood would be wasted breath.

"Why don't you ask your husband to help you?" he said pointedly.

Vela drew herself up. Her small hard face softened momentarily. "Denis

doesn't know how to get things out of the Scalies the way you do," she said. "He isn't—Denis has principles. Denis has ideals."

("Denis is too all-fired good and noble to butter up to the lizards in the disgusting way that *you* do," Henry translated silently.)

Aloud, he said, "He's your husband, though. It's his responsibility."

Vela stared at him reproachfully for a moment. Then she burst into tears. Ever since her child had been on the way she had been indulging in orgies of tears. Anything was apt to send her off into a crying jag.

Henry, who was some five years older than his sister, could remember, very dimly, back to the end of the era of feminine freedom, the time when women had been encouraged, nay, expected, to be intelligent.

The girls had been in the saddle then —they had ridden high, wide and handsome. But the rise of the government-sponsored cult of feminine modesty, chastity and brainlessness in the late 1970's had put an end to all that. Nowadays a woman was a cross between a dripping sponge and a vegetable.

Mrs. Pettit came waddling up. She had been lingering within earshot behind a tree in the park. "What have you been saying to Vela, son?" she demanded. "The poor girl! I won't have you upsetting her."

"I'm not upsetting her," Henry replied morosely. "She's upsetting herself. Excuse me. I'm going over to the laboratory."

He got up and started rapidly across the grass.

"Henry, *wait!*" his mother shrilled after him. Fortunately he was walking so fast that it was possible for him to pretend that he had not heard.

After lunch his brother-in-law, Denis Hardy, began on him. Denis went over the history of the last few months relentlessly, from the time the strato-liner *Pelican's* life boat had been trapped in the vortex and whirled into Hathor's universe until the present. He even made a digression to consider whether the vortex had been deliberately created or not.

"Don't you see," he finished, "Vela can't have her baby here. Why, she might—might even have to feed it herself."

"Well, what of it?" Henry replied abstractedly. "Women used to do it all the time." He had had a most interesting morning. He wanted to get back to the laboratory.

DENIS turned an angry red. "You're disgusting!" he said sharply. "Can't you keep a civil tongue—" He bit off the words and made an obvious effort at conciliation.

"Why don't you want to go home, Pettit? There's nothing here for a man."

"I like it," Henry answered simply. "Grass, flowers, air—it's a beautiful place."

"That's not the reason," Denis replied nastily. His little ramrod of a back grew straighter. "I know what you're up to in the laboratory. *Forbidden research.*"

"Everything was forbidden at home," Henry answered reasonably. "But we're not home now It's not forbidden here."

"Right's right and wrong's wrong, no matter where—" Once more Denis controlled himself. The gold braid on his shoulders quivered with effort. "Stay here yourself if you want, then," he snapped. "But the rest of us don't share your peculiar tastes. We want to get back to decency, normality. Is there any reason why you shouldn't use your influence with your scaly friends to have them send us back to Earth?"

There was—but how could he explain it to Denis? Denis had a mind which, even for the second officer of a stratosphere liner, was limited. How could Henry make him understand how horrible mental contact with Hathor was?

It was not that Hathor was malignant or even unkind. Henry had a faint but positive impression of benignity in his dealings with her. But the words with which the human mind bridges gulfs—*when, who, where*—became, when one was in contact with Hathor, the gulfs themselves.

To ask her when something had happened was to reel dizzily into the vastest of all enigmas for humanity—the nature of time itself. The question, "What is it?" forced the questioner to contemplate the cloudy, chilling riddle of his own personal identity. And even, "Where?" brought up a panorama of planes of being stretching out to infinity.

In between times it was not so bad. When Henry had not seen Hathor for

several days he was almost able to convince himself that he was not afraid of her. Then he would need something in the laboratory, go to see her to ask for it and come back from the interview sick and shaking, swearing that nothing —*nothing*—would induce him to plunge once more into the vast icy reaches of her inhuman intelligence.

He hunted for a reason Denis would understand. "It's no use asking her," he said finally. "Vela is going to have a child now and so Hathor would never let you go."

"But that's just why we want to go home."

"I know." Henry swallowed. "But Hathor and the others look on us as—you might say—pets. Whether or not they brought us here deliberately—myself, I think it was an accident—that's how they feel about us. And nobody ever turned a pet loose when it was going to have young."

There was no use in telling Denis that Hathor was responsible for Vela's child in the same way that a dog breeder is responsible for the birth of pups. It would only offend Hardy's dignity.

"Pets!" Denis answered, staring. "What are you talking about? They're nothing but lizards. They haven't got stereo, stratoliners, a-bombs, anything. We're their superiors in every way."

"They're *not* lizards," Henry replied. "They're very highly evolved mammals. That crest down the back of their heads is just an accident.

"The reason they don't have those material things is that they don't need them. Haven't you ever seen Hathor materialize things for my laboratory? She does it by moving her hands. She could turn a rubber ball inside out without making a hole in it.

"As far as that goes, if you think they're nothing but lizards, why are you trying to get them to send you back to your own time and space? No lizard I ever heard of could do that sort of thing."

HATHOR appeared. One moment the air was empty—the next it thickened and condensed, and there she was. As always when he first saw her Henry was divided between a wild desire to run for cover and an almost equally strong impulse to prostrate himself in awe at her feet.

He glanced about to see how the others were taking it. Denis, for all his bravado, was turning slowly white. And Vela, trying hard to be supercilious, was arranging the folds of her mantilla with shaking hands.

Not that there was anything especially horrible about Hathor to casual viewing. Though she was over fifteen feet tall and so strong that she could have picked up any of the humans in the park with one hand, her body was slight and well-proportioned.

She looked a good deal smaller than she actually was. The integument which covered her streamlined contours was pearly, pinkish, lustrous. And her tall vermilion crest could hardly be considered a deformity. It was something else that caused the reaction, something in the look of her eyes.

Her impersonal gaze moved slowly over the little group. It slowed and came to rest on Henry. The skies of her mind fixed on him.

"You're Henry," said the glassy, disembodied voice within his brain. "Henry. The one"—(not quite *one*—what Hathor was thinking was more like *semipermeable membrane* or *assemblage of points)*—"the one with the laboratory. Yes.

"I'm going to train you to"—(a dissolving kaleidoscope of images as thick as snowflakes. From the glittering throng of whirling, evanescent pictures Henry caught up two which lasted longer than the rest—one of a hawk leaving the falconer's wrist, the other of a slender key turning in a lock)—"Come along." Hathor motioned with her two-thumbed hand.

It was the first time she had ever come after him. Henry felt a premonitory shudder run through his limbs. None the less he got obediently to his feet.

It was nearly suppertime when he got back. The smoke of Mrs. Pettit's cooking fire drifted out into the still air and mingled pleasantly with the smell of frying meat.

Henry sank down limply on the grass beside the blaze, shielding his eyes with his hand from the light. It was not until supper had been eaten and the necessary refuse from the meal had been burned that he could bring himself to speak.

"Vela—Denis," he said, trying to

keep his voice from quivering. "Do you still want to get away from here? If you do I'll do all I can to help you. I want to get away myself."

There was a cautious silence. Vela opened her lips and then closed them again. At last Denis spoke.

"Why, yes, we still do. We thought you— Yes, we still want to get away." For a moment the ruddy flicker of the fire lit up the tight lips of his handsome small-featured face.

Whatever had made him decide to be tactful about Henry's abrupt *volte-face*, whether his silence was caused by policy or contempt, Henry was thankful for it. He could not possibly have put into words how hateful Hathor's recent compulsory extension of his senses had made the world where he now was to him.

He had learned too much ever to consider that world beautiful again. And trying to express it verbally would have been almost as bad as the original experience.

"What was Hathor doing with you today?" Vela asked curiously.

"Training me," Henry answered briefly.

"Training you? How?"

"It's something she does with her hands," Henry replied unwillingly. "They disappear. And then I hear what's going on inside the stones."

"Oh." Vela looked rather sick. "Well, are you just going to ask her to send us back to our earth, or what?"

"Asking her wouldn't be any use. She let me see that today. Anyhow, she knows we want to go home. But I've been thinking." Henry Pettit's voice was getting back its customary tones. "Why do people get rid of their pets? They get rid of them—"

"I don't like 'get rid of,'" Denis cut in sharply. "God knows we aren't here of our own choice and we want to get back to our own time and place. But we're alive here and that's something. We don't want to get killed trying to get back."

"We won't be killed. When people get rid of their pets they don't murder them. They send them to a friend in the country who has more room or turn them over to an animal shelter or something. They don't kill them.

"But as I was saying, why do they get rid of them? Basically for one of two reasons. You get rid of a pet when it's not a good pet—when it sulks, is sullen, uncooperative, disagreeable—or you get rid of it because it makes a nuisance of itself. Like chewing up rugs or howling at the moon. Now if we could only make nuisances of ourselves—"

"How?" Denis asked, frowning. "Hathor isn't around here much, so being noisy won't do any good."

"What about doing something with whatever you're working on in the laboratory, son?" Mrs. Pettit suggested. "Perhaps we could be nuisances with that."

"We can't have anything to do with the laboratory," Denis announced sternly. "Forbidden research is wrong, here or on Earth."

"Oh, be quiet, Denis," Vela said peevishly. Her husband looked as if he could hardly believe his ears. "This is lots too serious for us to be honorable," she went on as if in explanation. "Henry, if you can do anything with your research, do it."

"Well—I might try a matter canker. That's just about the most forbidden research there is. I'd have to be careful not to get a radioactive form of canker, of course."

"Would that annoy Hathor?"

"A matter canker? Yes. A matter canker would annoy anybody quite a lot."

"And if she gets mad enough at us, she'll send us back to our own time and space," Vela said. She yawned. "Let's go to bed early and get lots of sleep. And tomorrow we'll help Henry all we can."

HIS lab assistants were willing if not very bright. Clad in lead-impregnated coveralls they weighed, stirred, measured, filtered and proved to be so incompetent that on the second day Henry got rid of all of them except Vela.

Her measurements were more accurate than those of the others, and she didn't talk so much. Once or twice before he had suspected that she could be intelligent when it suited her to be.

"Listen, Henry, aren't you afraid Hathor will find out what we're doing before it's ready?" she asked late on the second afternoon. "Then she'd make us stop before we got annoying."

"I doubt it," Henry replied absently. They were engaged with a difficult bit

of titration. "There, that's enough—She used to visit the lab a good deal at first but not any more. I don't think she'll be around until it's time for me—for me to have another lesson. I hope we'll be gone before then."

"Well, but what about the canker itself? Won't it be dangerous? I should think it would give out a lot of heat."

"No," Henry replied, "there isn't any heat with a canker. Nobody knows why. And they can't find out because it's been ruled forbidden research. About the only direct danger to us would be if the canker got out of control. Nobody knows why but they do that sometimes."

He poured the solution into a crucible. "You see that switch down there by the betatron? All right, when I move my hand, depress it. Thanks."

A matter canker takes time to establish. There were failures in the early stages of Henry's. It was more than a week after his conversation with Vela that he got the canker into its ultimate form.

He carried it out of the laboratory, Vela following, and showed it to the others, who were sitting listlessly on the grass.

"It doesn't look like much," Denis said after a pause. He was turning the big flask critically in his hands. "Except for the color, that is. How could this annoy anyone?"

"It hasn't been activated yet," Henry explained. He took the flask back from Denis and set it on the ground. "I want you both to get into your coveralls. The canker isn't very radio-active but there's bound to be some radiation. So keep well back from it."

He adjusted the timing device on the neck of the flask. While Mrs. Pettit and Denis were getting into their long white coveralls he dropped in the gray-sheathed thorium pellets which were the activating charge. Once more he adjusted the timing device.

"Get back," he said. The first—second—third pellets dropped.

The flask dissolved. The gluey viscous stuff it held ran out sluggishly over the grass. Writhing, twisting, boiling, the grass was eaten away from it. The liquid disappeared. The canker was eating in.

"It's getting started nicely," Henry said.

A column of steam shot up. It enlarged, grew hollow. Now there was a hole, a growing one, in the ground. Its edges curled and bubbled and smoked. The hole widened, grew deeper.

A wind blew over the surface of the grass. It freshened. In a moment the leaves of the trees were in motion. The boughs began to rock. The column of steam broke off, reappeared soaringly, broke off again. The wind was growing to a gale.

"What is this, son?" Mrs. Pettit demanded. She had to put her mouth against Henry's head to make herself heard. "Where's the wind coming from?"

"Canker's creating a vacuum," Henry yelled back. "Air rushes in to fill it faster as the canker grows. Get back! *Get back!*"

The party hurried across the slick green surface of the grass toward safety, breaking at the last into a run. The giant wind kept trying to push them back.

"Further! *Further!*" Henry yelled. *"Get back!"*

ABRUPTLY the canker was lapping at the laboratory walls. The stones boiled evilly for a moment and no longer existed. The upper part of the structure fell in, disappeared.

Henry's face was greenish white. "It's getting out of control. *Run! Run!*" he said.

They ran. Shrieking, stumbling, trying to breathe, they ran. The canker was faster than they. With the flowing ease of a creature in a dream it gained on them. It was no more than a yard from them when they reached the site of the cooking fire. Two seconds more and it was lapping at their heels.

Vela collapsed and fell. Denis put his hands under her armpits and wildly tried to drag her along. Mrs. Pettit, her face a mask of terror inside the glazed hood of her coveralls, was screaming inaudibly. The wind was horrible.

Hathor appeared. She was standing in the air eight or ten feet above their heads. Though her eyes still had their uncanny look of remoteness and impassivity, something about her suggested exasperation consciously controlled. Standing securely on nothingness she began to make quick, plucking motions with her hands. Slipping, sliding, twisting, they moved in space and out of it.

There was a terrific lightning flash. The world dissolved in curtains of white light. Henry, staggering back from the impact of the prodigy, was amazed that his retinae had not been burned out. It did not seem possible that the eyes could be flooded with such light and still see.

There was another even vaster flash. Slowly, reluctantly, it died away. Henry looked up at Hathor with his scalded eyeballs. Her hands still moved in their twisting pattern, sliding in and out of visibility, but more deliberately than they had. Tiny veins stood out on her temples. Her lips were compressed. Plainly she was imposing some great exertion on herself. The howling wind had died away.

The earth, the horizon, the air, twanged like a plucked bowstring. In the most horrible moment of the afternoon, Henry perceived that everywhere about him were slowly opening doors. Convulsively he shut his eyes.

When he opened them again Hathor had put down her hands. The air was calm and untroubled. All around the party the grass lay as fresh, as green, as unbroken as it had been before the matter canker was set up. The only sign of its existence that the canker had left was an exceptionally heavy coating of dew. But the laboratory was gone.

Hathor fixed her impassive eyes on Henry. Her face had resumed its ordinary inexpressiveness, but he felt the fright that always came over him at mental contact with her. A huge voice began to print itself awesomely in his brain — "DON'T EVER DO THAT AGAIN."

IT hadn't worked. Hathor had neither punished them nor got rid of them. And now what were they to do? The laboratory was gone. They had no way of annoying Hathor with another matter canker even if they had been minded to try it. All that was left them was to try to be unsatisfactory pets.

They discussed it night after night as they sat around the coals of their fire. They could decide on nothing. It was not until Hathor, coming to get Henry for the third installment of his training, took Denis along too, that a definite program emerged.

Denis was shaken by his experience. It amused Henry, who was becoming accustomed to the horror that Hathor's training involved, to see how shaken he was. Denis' tight little mouth was as firm as ever when he remembered to keep it firm. But in moments of inattention his jaw hung slackly and his lips had a tendency to shake.

"This can't go on," he said, pacing up and down on the grass. "Vela's not well—haven't you noticed? She needs medical attention but I wouldn't trust Hathor to prescribe for her. It's not myself I'm thinking of, it's her. We've got to get home."

"It would be nice if we could," Henry replied warily. "But—"

"But what?"

"Nothing. Do you have a plan?"

"Yes. We'll run away."

"Run away? Hathor can bring us back in ten seconds as soon as she notices we're gone."

"Yes, of course she can," Denis replied. "But if we keep on running away and she has to keep on bringing us back —you see what I mean. She only comes to visit us every four or five days, but if every time she comes we've run away, she'll soon get tired of it. Bringing us back will be so annoying she'll send us home to get rid of us."

Henry was silent.

"What's the matter?" Denis asked challengingly. "Don't you think it would work? We could save up our supplies and take food with us. Besides, there's a lot of wild fruit."

"Oh, I think it would work. That's what's bothering me."

Denis' back stiffened. For a moment he was again the martinet. "Explain yourself," he rapped out.

"I'm afraid." Henry swallowed. "Afraid to annoy her. Afraid of what she'd do."

Denis looked relieved. "Nonsense," he said heartily. "If she didn't do anything to us for setting up the matter canker she won't do anything to us no matter what we do. That's obvious. Besides, what could be worse than what she does when she's training us? That—that almost makes me sick."

Henry let his hands dangle down between his knees. His eyes had taken on an odd bright look. "That's pretty bad, isn't it?" he said. He managed a smile. "Pretty bad. But maybe something could be worse."

"Rot! I'm going to talk to Vela and

her mother about it. If they agree will you come along with us? After all, you're in this too."

There was a pause. "All right," Henry replied at last. "As you say, I'm in this with you. If you go I'll go with you."

Hathor had made one of her visits only the day before. She made them at irregular intervals but it was probable that three or four days would elapse before she would visit Henry and the others again. On the third day, carrying what supplies they had been able to accumulate, the party escaped.

The escape was unspectacular. They walked for a mile or two through the rolling parkland where Hathor had established them, turned to the right and were on a road that was no more than a grassy track. Once in the distance they saw a pair of Hathor's people walking slowly along. Sometimes the big mammals walked, instead of simply materializing where they wished to be.

Denis made the party hide beside the road until the big people were safely out of sight. Later the party passed a lonely building whose walls were shimmering gray webs. Henry identified it to himself as a place where a dimension-spanning vortex, like the one which had brought them thither, was being made. By noon the party was in a rather open wood. They decided to stay there for the night.

Hathor came for them on the second day. She did not seem angry, only more than usually remote. She set them down on the sward beside the open stoa in the park where they slept, and gazed at them. Then she disappeared.

Denis was jubilant. "It's working!" he said, very pleased with himself. "The next time we run away or maybe the time after that she'll send us home to get rid of us. You'll see, old chap."

"Will she?" Henry answered with a sigh. "Well, I hope you're right."

THE second attempt at escape was not very successful. Hathor came for them when they had been gone no more than a couple of hours. The third time . . .

Denis was in the lead when they reached the boundary of the park. He was talking cheerily to Vela, his head turned, as they walked along. When he faced about once more, Hathor was standing there. Her crimson-tipped crest waved gently in the breeze as she bent over and picked up Denis.

The action itself was ordinary enough but Henry felt a sickening pang of apprehension. He plucked at Vela's arm. "Run," he said hoarsely. "You and mother run and hide."

"But—what's the matter? What's she doing with her hands?" Vela's eyes were round. "Why is she holding him so tight?" Her voice went up. "Is she—he said she wouldn't hurt us. Oh! *Oh!*"

Hathor's hands were slipping smoothly in and out of the web of invisibility. Now she put one of them up to Denis' head. Eerily, unbelievably, her fingers slid inside the skull.

Denis began to scream. It was a horrible high squeal like a frightened rabbit's. At the sound Vela pressed her fists to her ears and started to run. Mrs. Pettit hesitated, looking after her. Then, moaning and slobbering, she bobbed after the girl. Henry stayed behind, watching, until he was sure what was going on. Then he too turned and ran.

There was little cover in the rolling park. The women were cowering behind a big granite boulder and there Henry joined them. Denis gave scream after shattering scream.

The screams stopped. Henry looked over the top of the rock.

Tears were still flowing down Denis' cheeks but the convulsed terror had gone out of his face. It had been replaced with a vegetable imbecile calm.

Hathor put him down very gently on the grass. He walked eight or ten paces uncertainly and then sat down on the sward. He pulled up a handful of grass and examined its roots.

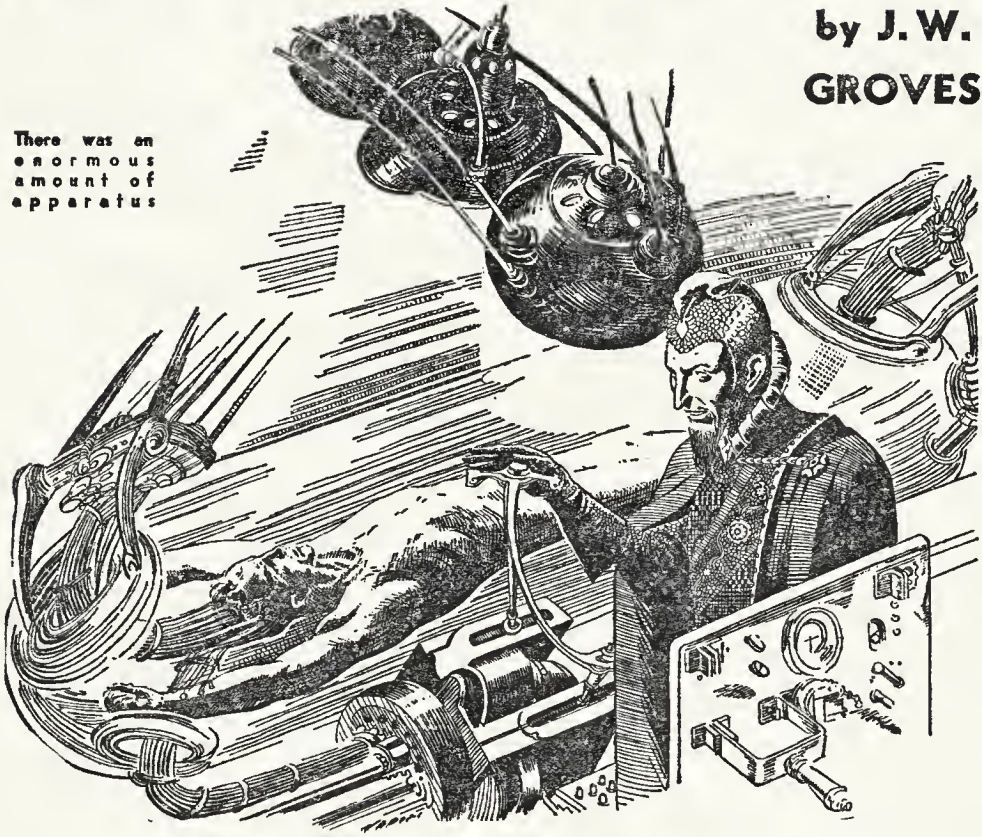
Vela tugged desperately at the hem of Henry's sleeve. "What's she done to him?" she demanded in an agonized whisper. "Oh, what is it? Henry, Henry, Henry—what's she done?"

Henry turned to face her. "We geld domestic animals to make them better pets, don't we?" he answered. His mouth twisted shockingly to one side. "Hathor's done something to his brain to make a better pet out of him. So he'll stay here always without wanting to get away, so he won't be a nuisance any more. That's what she's doing. She's making us better pets. *Better pets! Better pets!*"

He was still shrieking the words when Hathor picked him up.

REGROWTH

by J. W. GROVES



There was an enormous amount of apparatus

Ruthless Doctor Sutgen performs a weird experiment in cellular development — with some amazing consequences!

I WALKED very carefully along the corridor of the hospital. My new leg was still a little wobbly. Nothing wrong with it, of course. There never is anything wrong with a new part after a Sutgen regrowth, but naturally the freshly-acquired muscles are soft, unexercised.

There was a bench half way along the corridor. One end of it was already occupied by a youngish, thin-faced man dressed in dark clothing. Feeling in need of a rest I flopped onto the other end of the seat. "Excuse me," I said. "But have you seen a lady in a red coat?"

"I'm sorry, but I haven't," he said.

"She's my wife," I explained. "She promised to meet me here." I grinned and went on, "I expect she's still dithering about coming up the grav-shaft. We have the old-fashioned elevators at our apartment house."

He smiled pleasantly. "Being

swooshed up an open tube without any floor under you, is rather terrifying if you aren't used to it," he sympathized.

I nodded. "It's a funny thing about my wife. Normally she's scared stiff by all sorts of things. Grav-shafts and mice and thunderstorms. You'd have thought she was just the one to faint away with sheer terror when I had my leg crushed under that truck. But she didn't. She got me clear, stopped the bleeding, escorted me to the hospital, just as if she'd been used to handling casualties all her life."

"Women are like that," he commented. "They'll panic over trivialities, but at the bottom there is a streak of hard common sense in them. If any really big trouble crops up, you can trust them to think of the right thing to do—and do it."

The conversation languished a little after that. Trying to find a polite way of reviving it I asked, "Are you waiting to meet a patient, or have you just had some part regrown?"

"Neither," he answered as he smiled. "I work here."

All the time that I had been talking to him I had a vague feeling at the back of my mind that there was something familiar about his face. As soon as he said that I remembered why. "Of course!" I said. "You're Walker!"

"I— Well, yes. I suppose I am. In a way. It's a moot point really."

I must have looked as astonished as I felt.

"What do you mean? Don't you know whether you are or not?"

It was his turn to look surprised. "Do you mean to say you haven't heard about me? I thought everybody who has ever come within a mile of this place knew. It's such common talk. Although of course Sutgen has managed to keep it out of the papers and journals so far."

"I don't know anything about you beyond that you were Sutgen's assistant at the time the discovery was made," I admitted.

"Guinea pig would be more correct, perhaps," he said. "Although assistant was my official position. It was ten years ago that I first came to this hospital, raw and nervous, and was assigned to help Sutgen with his investigations."

THE man grinned in an odd sort of way and went on:

"Professionally that was a piece of good luck for me, although I didn't know it at the time. But from any other point of view it was a bad break. Indeed I think I got the job only because nobody who knew the ropes could be induced to take it.

"Sutgen is a terrible man to work with. Bad-tempered, foul-mouthed, and with as much consideration for the feelings and rights of his underlings as an old-fashioned slave driver.

"One thing I must say for the old gorilla, though. He is fanatically devoted to science. Too much so if anything. He's the type that you could imagine in the role of one of those story book villains. The unscrupulous scientist who goes around vivisecting human beings in the search for new knowledge.

"You know the line of investigation he was working on at the time, of course. Primitive forms of life, and certain of the crustacea, can regrow practically any major part of their body if they lose it. The process is a mysterious one, but Sutgen was of the opinion that the secret of it lay in what he termed the cell memory—that is to say that every cell in an individual body contains within itself the pattern of the whole, and can, under the correct stimulus, reproduce that whole or any part of it.

"He was convinced that this applied not only to the cells of the lower creatures, but to those of all living things, including man. He believed that the ability to utilize this for the purposes of re-creation was not completely lost, but had just become, as it were, misplaced somewhere along the line of evolutionary development.

"Furthermore he was convinced that this latent power could be revived.

"We know now that he was right, but I don't think anybody believed it at the time. At any rate I know I didn't. The whole business seemed to me as futile as chasing a will-o'-the-wisp. And when, on top of that, I began to learn just what a bully Sutgen is I soon worked myself into a state of rebellion. I'm pretty sure I should have broken completely with Sutgen and the whole hospital within a few weeks of my coming there if it hadn't been for Susan. She's my wife now— At least—

"Anyway, at the time she was a young student. We met by accident in the grounds of the place while I was taking an airing during one of my very few periods of leisure. And, as young people will when they find themselves attracted towards each other, we began to have quite a lot of such accidents. Before long I made up my mind that I would stick it where I was, rather than go off somewhere else and see less of her.

"After six months we decided that we would marry as soon as we were in a position to do so. Though just when that would be I couldn't for the life of me foresee.

"Late one evening—too late for my liking, for I knew that before long Susan would be outside waiting for me—Sutgen and I were working on a new experiment that he had just devised. It involved the irradiation of living tissue with some of the shorter electro-magnetic waves, while at the same time subjecting it to the effects of stimulating drugs. He had been fiddling with his apparatus for over an hour without saying a word, when suddenly he raised his head and barked 'Adrenalin.'

"I was impatient to be gone, but I knew better than to mention it. Instead I turned and went to get what he wanted.

"During the years that he had spent in that stuffy little laboratory of his, he had managed to accumulate an enormous amount of apparatus, though how he succeeded in squeezing the appropriations out of the board is more than I can understand.

"At any rate, there the stuff was, standing in every corner, littering the floor and shelves, jammed under the bench.

"The bottle he needed was on a high shelf in the corner of the room, out of my reach. It wouldn't have taken a moment to fetch some steps, but being young and silly and in a hurry I didn't bother. Instead I clambered on top of a small cupboard that was immediately under the shelf.

"I would have been all right even then if I'd watched my step, but my eyes were on the bottle, not on where I was going. Just as I was stretched out to my full height, I trod onto the round metal case of a clinical thermometer. The thing rolled away from under me, I did an ungraceful pirouette, and fell onto the bench in front of Sutgen.

SUTGEN went purple and began screaming in his usual manner. 'You clumsy young fool! Why the blazes, didn't you be more careful—'

"I rolled over and lowered my feet to the floor. I knew I had hurt myself, especially my hand, but for the moment I was too sick and dizzy with the pain to realize exactly what had happened. Then I saw.

"As I was falling I had instinctively put out my hand to save myself. In front of the long row of glowing tubes that he had been using, Sutgen had placed a glass jar containing the newest specimen. I had smashed the jar, and ground the broken glass into my flesh. My palm was lacerated in a dozen places, and the first finger was hanging only by a thin shred of skin.

"Sutgen broke off his tirade.

" 'Here,' he said gruffly. 'Let me fix that for you, you blasted young idiot.'

"I let him stop the bleeding, and send me over to the accident ward to have it bandaged properly.

"On the way there I had a chance to think, with the result that I felt sicker than ever. The loss of that finger was going to be a serious handicap to me in my career. And now I had Susan to think of as well as myself.

"The healing of my hand seemed to proceed normally enough at first, except that the flesh of the palm knitted together rather more quickly than was to be expected. It wasn't until the end of the fourth week after my fall that I noticed a small, hairlike pink growth beginning to sprout from the severed stump of my finger.

"I was rather worried about it at the start. I feared that some malignant growth had been set going by the effect of the sudden loss of the member—though I could recall no such previous case in recorded medical history.

"Then, when the thing had become as thick as a matchstick I noticed a horny speck of fingernail at the top of it. I knew then what was happening! I was so exited that I rushed straight over to Sutgen, though it was strictly against his rules for anyone to interrupt him at his work.

"For once in his life, though, the old boy forgave me even that. When I showed the newly developing finger he grew almost incoherent with excitement.

" 'I've done it!' he chortled. 'I've done it! You must have jolted my radiation apparatus slightly when you fell, and turned up just the right combination. One effective enough to make further stimulation by drugs unnecessary. Of course I don't know exactly what you did, but I do know what I was using at the time. It won't take long to trace the change you made.'

"He began to flex the new finger, and examine it through a magnifying glass to see if it was developing the normal skin markings. I believe that if I had let him he would have dissected it to find out if the muscles and the bone contents were as they should be. And then he said something that made me shudder a a little even at that time—though I didn't realize the full significance of it.

" 'What a pity,' he remarked, 'that I didn't keep the piece of separated tissue. It would have been interesting to put it in a nutrient solution, and see what happened to it.'

"I'm glad you didn't," I snapped.

"He seemed surprised. 'Why?'

"Well—I don't know exactly. It seems a gruesome idea to me."

"He spoke with a return to his usual tone. 'Nonsense. Gruesome. A true scientist shouldn't know the meaning of the word.'

"As soon as I had finished with him I hurried away to find Susan. I knew she would be delighted to learn that I was going to get my finger back again. Well, although I had played a rather ignominiously minor part in the making of the great discovery, I knew that the fact I had been working with Sutgen at the time was bound to bring me a little reflected fame, and be a help to me in my future career. It didn't put a definite date to our marriage, but it did seem to bring it nearer.

DURING the next couple of months or so life was rosy. The most affectionate mother in the world could not have watched over her baby with more loving care than Sutgen and I watched over that baby finger of mine. And as soon as it was plain that it was going to grow back to its normal size and shape, we set about trying to find the exact combination of rays that had produced it.

"That didn't take us too long. Sutgen's radiation gadget is a sturdy affair, and even my crashing down on the bench in front of it hadn't upset the readings to any very great extent. The vital figures, we found, were only slightly different from those he had been working with.

"It is said the ancients believed that the gods grow jealous if a man has too much luck.

"The first intimations I had that there might be something in their theory were several attacks of what I thought to be acute indigestion. Then a constant, gnawing pain that located itself definitely in the right side of my abdomen. I could have diagnosed what was wrong with myself easily enough if I'd thought out the full implications of my regrown finger, but foolishly I let old habits of thought hide the truth from me, until one day when I was working with Sutgen the pain suddenly became so excruciating that I doubled up with it.

"I knew what was the matter with me. I had appendicitis.

"Sutgen raised his eyebrows and informed me that plenty of people get it.

"But I knew I had had it before. My appendix had been taken out when I was a kid. Those rays of his must have affected my whole body. This wasn't going to be so good. An appendectomy every six months was an expensive price to pay for a new finger.

"Sutgen informed me it would not be as bad as all that. The majority of people went right through their lives without knowing they had an appendix. He claimed I had just been unlucky, and told me to have this one out. The odds were that I'd never be troubled by the next one. He even offered to do the operation for me and promised he wouldn't even charge me anything.

"I was agreeably surprised by the offer. I knew he was a competent surgeon, but he hadn't bothered himself with routine operations for years. The accidental assistance that I had given him in making his discovery must have put him in a generous mood. At least, that's what I thought at the time. I should have known Sutgen better.

"I accepted with thanks. Fortunately there was a bed vacant in the hospital

at the time, and as I had already left things longer than I should, we decided that the operation had better be performed right away. Within an hour he had me under the anesthetic.

"My awakening was slow. I remember opening my eyes several times, and then closing them again through sheer lack of interest in the messages they brought me. I was not exactly incurious, but rather unaware that there was anything to be curious about.

"I lay in that condition for hours. Then, gradually, self-awareness began to creep back to me. I became a person again, instead of a mere perceiver of disconnected sensations. Fleeting snatches of memory came. I stirred uneasily. There was something, something about myself and my surroundings, that I ought to know!

"Overhead was a single, glaring yellow blob. And all around me a pattern of reddish colored oblongs, separated from each other by streaks of dirty white. Here and there were widespreading stains of black dust. The final stage of self-realization was swift, and with its completion I sat up in the bed in alarm. I had been sick. Operated upon. I ought to be in hospital. But this place was no hospital ward. It was a cellar!

"I looked around for a bell push, or some other means of summoning assistance. There was nothing. So I tried shouting. My voice echoed back to me hollowly from the walls of the place, but nobody came. Finally, after sliding my legs over the edge of the bed and trying them carefully to see if I was strong enough, I got up and began to search for my clothes. They were not there.

BY this time I was in a high rage, and pulling a blanket off the bed I wrapped it round myself, determined to explore until I found somebody from whom I could demand an explanation. The door, which was behind the bed, was unlocked. I ascended the steep, narrow flight of stairs that led from the cellar.

"I was fully aware that I was in Sutgen's house. I had visited the place only twice before, but I had no difficulty in recognizing it. The discovery, however, answered only the first of my questions. Why had Sutgen brought me here? And how the devil had he prevailed on the authorities at the hospital to allow such a thing?

"A swift search soon convinced me that the house was empty. I suppose that as I had just got up from a sick bed and was very thinly clothed, I should really have stayed indoors until somebody returned. But I was too bewildered and in far too much of a bad temper to think of doing the most prudent thing. As soon as I had satisfied myself that there really was nobody about I opened the front door and plunged out into the street.

"I bumped straight into Susan. 'Thank the Lord!' I said huskily. 'Susan, what's all this about? Do you know?'

"She gaped at me. 'I think I should be asking you that,' she said. 'How did you get down here, anyway? And why come undressed like that? When I left you at the hospital ten minutes ago—'

"'Ten minutes ago!'" I shouted. "'But that's impossible! I know I've been in that cellar for a long, long, time.'

"I was shivering now, partly from the chill of the street air, and partly from fear. The Universe seemed suddenly to have gone mad. Either the Universe or I.

"Bewilderment and the beginnings of terror made me irrational. I felt that Susan was in with some general conspiracy against me, and I wanted to beg her to drop it. "'Susan,'" I said. "'Listen. Please. You said you loved me. Promised to marry me. And now—'

"'Promised!' Her voice rose to a squeak with sheer astonishment. 'But I did marry you! A month ago!'

"She was worried now. Badly worried. She caught my arm beneath its blanket covering, and insisted that I come home. She thought I had been working too hard lately.

"Over her shoulder I caught sight of Sutgen hurrying towards us. I broke free of her grip and went up to him, demanding an immediate explanation.

"I saw that he was frightened. He begged me to come back into the house. Susan was also demanding an explanation.

"He almost jumped into the air at the suggestion. He claimed that any explanation was impossible at that time. He soothed Susan into going home. Telling her that her husband would be there soon and everything would turn out satisfactorily. He had his key out by now, and suddenly he flung open the

door of his house and thrust me inside. For a moment I heard Susan's voice exclaiming indignantly that she wanted to know what it was all about. Then suddenly the sound was cut off by the slamming of the heavy door.

" 'I'm sorry about this,' Sutgen began pacifyingly. 'But I had to do it. You became aware of yourself before I expected it, and so I didn't have time to explain anything to you. And I couldn't leave you out there. He might have come along any minute.'

" 'He?' I asked incredulously. 'Whom do you mean?'

" 'Walker.'

" 'Walker? But I'm—'

"And then the whole monstrous story became clear to me. I trembled and felt sick with impotent fury. I could have killed Sutgen. Indeed, for a minute or two I tried to, but he is a bigger man than I am, and soon threw me off.

" 'Don't be an ungrateful fool,' he snarled. 'What are you grumbling about? If it hadn't been for me you wouldn't exist.'

"Though I'm ashamed to admit it I began to cry then. It wasn't only myself I was thinking of. It was Susan. What was she going to do when she learned about it? It was enough to drive any woman mad!"

JUST at this time, Doctor Walker broke off his story and turned his head as there came the sound of a door opening at the end of the corridor. I blinked slightly with astonishment as I saw the man who came through. I had read a great deal about Walker, but I never knew that he had a twin brother. Yet the man approaching us from the door was an almost exact duplicate of the one sitting beside me. Hair, features, build, clothes. In one respect only did they differ. Walker wore a red tie. This man was wearing a blue one.

The doctor faced me again. "I see there's no need for me to tell you the end of my little history," he chuckled. "You can guess the rest."

I was dumber than he gave me credit for being. "Why no. I'm afraid I can't."

"Come now," he admonished with a grin. "Remember what I told you about Sutgen's theory? That every cell contains within itself a memory pattern of the whole organism, and under the correct stimulus can reproduce that whole. Remember, too, what the scientific monomaniac wanted to do with my finger!"

I gasped. "Of course. The separated tissue from that operation. He kept it. And it grew into you." I was genuinely horrified now. "Heavens, man. No wonder you were worried about your—his wife's sanity. It must have been terrible."

He shook his head, smiling. "You underestimate her. As we men generally do underestimate their sex. We had to tell her eventually. Of course, but as I said before, women may panic over trivialities, but at the bottom there is a streak of hard common sense in them. If any really big trouble crops up you can trust them to think of the right thing to do and do it."

Another door in the corridor began to open. The doctor inclined his head courteously. "And now I must leave you," he said. "Good afternoon." With that he rose and joined the duplicate of himself.

The door opened wider. Through it came two women, one wearing a red scarf, one wearing a blue scarf.

The one with the blue scarf was young, slim, dark-haired and vivacious, with wide-set brown eyes that gleamed of mischief, and full red lips that were curved into a smile of welcome.

The one with the red scarf was young, slim, dark-haired and vivacious, with wide-set brown eyes that gleamed of mischief, and full red lips that were curved into a smile of welcome.

The Dr. Walker who was wearing a blue tie went up to the woman who was wearing a blue scarf. The Dr. Walker who was wearing a red tie went up to the woman who was wearing a red scarf.

"Hullo, Sue darling!" they said simultaneously.

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The First One

It was up to Bus Bannister to climb into a rocket ship presumably headed for the Moon, or else....

JAXON BRADLAW leaned forward, his belly against the edge of his walnut desk, leveled a fat finger at the lean young man who sat across from him and said, "Remember Lindbergh, Bannister! Remember Lindbergh!"

He sighed and leaned back, as though the argument was settled.

"Bus" Bannister, recently liberated via the discharge route, from the discipline of Army Test Rocket Center Three, smiled gently.

"You remember him, Bradlaw. I can't. He flew the ocean three years before I was born."

Bradlaw sighed again. "I'll go over it once more, Bannister. No more. And this time I want a straight answer."

By JOHN D. MacDONALD

"I've been giving you a straight answer, mister. No."

"We don't like that answer, Bannister. Now listen. You know the legislation. It says, in effect, that the proceeds of the Miller Fund will be turned over to the first commercial outfit that can successfully demonstrate a practical method of space travel. A circling of the moon and safe return to earth will be considered as a successful demonstration. My boy, that fund is seventeen million dollars and we mean to have it."

Bannister forced a yawn. "You've said that before." He lifted a languid hand and tapped off the fingers: "Archbold, Hunter, Magerelli, Kolzak. Four good guys you shot into space—*whoom!* No answer. Nothing. Okay, so you looked me up just because I happen to be the only guy who has gotten a thousand miles off the surface and got down again. Your man Harder talked me into applying for a discharge. You socked ten thousand into my account as a guarantee of good faith. You implied that you had something hot—something new. Yep, I'd like to be the first guy to do it—you know that. But why should I take a chance on the same blasted equipment you killed four good guys with?"

Bradlaw said in an exasperated tone, "But, my boy, we're not asking you to take that chance. You don't take any chances at all. Our public relations people set it all up. Crowds come to see the take-off. You get into the ship. We have a special panel built. You get out through that and shut yourself into a recess in one of the lead shields. Twenty-five good inches of lead to protect you from any part of the flareback as the ship takes off. Everybody goes home. That night we get you out of the shield, put you under wraps and fly you down to Mr. Bessor's rancho in Mexico where we've got the duplicate ship ready. When the time comes, you take off in it and make your landing back here. We coach you in what to say. You'll be a hero, my boy, and with the seventeen million. I know we can develop the equipment so that in a short time the trip can be made—without any faking."

"I don't like it," Bus Bannister said, and yawned again.

HARDER, a grim man in his forties, with a face like a protruding shelf of slate rock, pointed a thumb at Bannister and said, "He says he doesn't like it."

"Hop off that Hemingway routine, Harder," Bradlaw said. He looked at Bannister again, and said gently, "Tell me just why you don't like it, my boy."

"In the first place, it's a seventeen-million-dollar fraud. In the second place, I won't be able to explain the lack of close-up pictures of the moon's surface."

"We've got faked ones ready, made from the best photographs available."

"Okay. So you have. In the third place, I've been looking over the equipment that you think is so hot, and you haven't even caught up to the army and I doggone well know that General Rockets is way ahead of the army. You're fiddling around with a space drive that we discarded four months ago. You've still got manual controls on your counteracting jets for the landing.

"The army and General are using automatic controls that compute weight, height, speed and brake it just enough. Also, your fuel adjustment means that you hit top velocity too soon. I think that you killed four guys that way. They couldn't take the Gs involved. Even your compartment is crummy. You got an eight-foot recoil on your pilot seat, but only in one direction. What the devil does the guy do when he lands? Scrape himself off the port with a putty knife? With the stuff you're using, people will know it's been faked. I would, and I just fly the things—I don't build them."

Jaxon Bradlaw snapped at his front tooth with a yellow thumbnail, making a small pocking noise in the quiet office. Bannister glanced idly toward the door, reading in reverse the name, JAXON BRADLAW—PRESIDENT written on the outside of the opaque glass. President of Spaceways, Inc. Bus sneered gently at himself for being suckered into his present unhappy position. True, there was the ten thousand dollars in the bank, but the army had been paying him that in one year when you figured in the space bonus. And no income tax to pay. Well, maybe they'd take him back.

But even as he thought it, he knew that he was dreaming. Spaceways had gone too far in telling their plans to Bus Bannister. It was a game they were playing now. He knew that with seventeen million at stake, he'd never be permitted to walk out knowing what he did about their plans.

He had to admit that the plan was clever. It might work. Thousands would see the ship make that slow, initial, six-foot climb while inertia was overcome and then scream up into the blue, appearing to angle off toward the east due to rotational effect. The government would be checking the entire surface of the earth with radar to guard against any sly returning. Their vigilance

would be relaxed by the time he took off from Mexico. Yes, it might work.

Bradlaw said, slowly, "You know, Bannister, you might have something there."

"Where?"

What you said about the methods. We have made some advances, but—well, considering what we plan to do, it wasn't thought worth the expense to make the alterations. But, suppose we go along with you. Suppose you work with our people on as many changes as you want, and we incorporate them in both ships. It will delay the starting time, but—"

"I still don't like it."

"He still doesn't like it, boss."

"Shut up, Harder. My boy, I hate to do this. But you force me, my boy. You force me!" Here it comes, Bus thought. "You have a choice. You can help us fake the flight, get your hundred thousand when we get the seventeen million. Or, you can go along with Mr. Harder. He makes a specialty of accidents. He has one that can happen to you. A nice clean accident, but permanent, I'm afraid."

Bus Bannister tried to yawn again, but his jaw felt stiff, his mouth dry. He straightened up in the chair and glanced over at Harder. Harder was inspecting his fingernails. Mr. Bradlaw hummed softly and tapped on the plate glass desk top with a yellow pencil.

"You're pretty convincing," Bus said.

"My boy," we have to be. There's a great deal at stake. You see, we know that you often take a bit too much to drink. You might say too much. Our way is safer."

"And what happens if, after the fake, I ask for some more money to keep my mouth shut?"

"I'm afraid that you'd be lynched if you told that it all had been a fake. Men who are to go down in history can't afford to wave clay feet at the citizens. We'll trust you to be smart enough to realize that."

"And you'll make all the changes we'd ought to have?"

"You heard my promise."

Bus managed a grin, even though his heart felt heavy inside him. He knew that he had been often wild, often reckless, but never dishonest—and this would be fraud on an international scale. He would be hailed by all races, all men. First man to the moon. Cheers! Slap that boy on the back, hey?

"Guess I better go along with you."

"Or go no place at all," Harder said.

"Shut up, Harder. Bannister, you'll never regret this."

BRADLAW was as good as his word. For the next seven weeks, Bus Bannister worked at the Las Cruces Launching Area of Spaceways, Inc. The sleek ship, one hundred and twenty-one feet long, twenty feet thick at the widest point, was stripped down to the bare hull and the jets changed to allow for a more gradual pickup of speed. The recoil arrangements on the pilot seat were changed to Bus's specifications, the front jets changed to automatic control. He knew that, as the changes were made to the master ship, identical changes were being made in the duplicate south of the border.

Always, Harder was with him. Every minute of the day and night. There was no avoiding his quiet, cynical alertness.

The special escape-hatch was made at night, the edges grooved so that the joining was invisible. The recess was made in the lead shields. Bus spent over an hour one night practising the escape, sliding down into the deep cavity in the lead which had been prepared for him. He did it over and over until each move was automatic.

On the night before the launching, he put on the protective suit and watched the installation of the master capsules for the atomic drive. Three workmen died in the shops that night. Bus realized that they were the three who had done work on the escape hatch, on the recess in the lead shield. He told himself that it was best that way—the fewer people who knew, the better. A world hero couldn't walk around chewing his fingers and taking quick looks over his shoulder—he had to be sure of his prestige.

* * *

Weather was right. The yellow sun flared down out of the blue sky and the multitudes sat in their cars and aircraft, listening to the speeches over the P.A. system. The Vice President was the guest of honor. He spoke at length.

Bus heard parts of it:

"—intrepid young man . . . vision of the future . . . conquest of space . . . new worlds . . . the stars come home . . . where others have failed . . . we honor the dead and pledge ourselves, nay, re-dedicate ourselves—"

He was grabbed and hauled blushing and confused onto the platform, the silver face of the mike in front of him, the television cameras staring at him with inquisitive eyes.

He said, "All this is fine, but—well, I'm just another guy who tries to drive these things. If I do it, it will be because a lot of other guys sweated out the details in the lab. The astrogation is mechanical, almost. I'll

(Concluded on page 162)

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 9)

at-heel Brookline house. In short, he wants to open Ezra up.

Wilson finally agrees to help with the ghoulish experiment and Dr. Link sets up his instruments to trap and measure the radiations. But things go a little haywire and Bill Wilson is unconscious when the radiations stream out.

The experiment is only a partial success according to the instruments—but it is overwhelmingly so to Bill. For when he recovers he finds himself possessed by a capricious seventeenth-century invisible maid, Priscilla, who claims to have been buried unjustly in the coffin with Ezra.

Under Priscilla's guidance he finds himself on the way to an amazing professional success as a healer. Unfortunately, however, his social life takes a sudden dip, for Priscilla is jealous and her antics at poor Natalie's garden party are hardly conducive to friendliness and good feeling.

There are other drawbacks, for despite Bill's new-found fame and fortune and his increasing enchantment with Priscilla, Ezra is loose in the land and causes disaster after disaster of unprecedented proportions. Having the powers of enchantment at his command can be fun, Bill finds, but it is also a headache.

So when Natalie and Dr. Link, getting on the trail of the truth, open a counter-offensive, Bill is squarely in the middle. From then on climax builds to climax and to one of the most surprising ultimate endings in recent science fiction history—for this story has a sound pseudo-scientific basis for all of its amazing fantastic elements. It's different, it's exciting, it's fun.

Ward Hawkins of *Saturday Evening Post* fame takes over the Hall of Fame spot in March with his unforgettable MEN MUST DIE, a story of the first trip to Jupiter and of the incredibly heroic sacrifice of Dr. Martin Seabrook.

Dr. Seabrook conceived and virtually single-handed created the trip to the biggest of the nine planets and was its leader all the way—until he found himself facing a situation for which he alone held the key —at the cost of his life.

This is a novelet of strong interest and of a type which is seldom published in this more advanced era. But it is a well-written job and an interesting and suspenseful one all the way. It richly merits its niche in the Hall of Fame.

There will be more in March, of course—other novelets and short stories culled from a line-up of tales and authors which has become, we honestly feel, the strongest in the field. Also the features and departments —with the Bookshelf and the Review of the Science Fiction Fan Publications and finally the Vibrating Ether. March looks like another strong issue all the way.

ETHERGRAMS

THE girls, who have been out in force of late, seem virtually to have dropped out of letter contention this time. Why? We wouldn't know. But we miss 'em. For the rest, we have a good bit of controversy and some interesting theorizing and a few drops of humor and the inevitable overflowing meed of criticism. So let's at them with a couple of short takes first.

COMMENDATION FOR RENE
by E. S. Hanrahan

Sirs: Just a brief word of commendation for Rene LaFayette's current series on The Conquest of Space. Certainly the best that has appeared in SS or TWS in the past seven years. Naturally the idea is not new but LaFayette has handled the stories in a manner which can be best described as masterful. If the following episodes remain on a par with those published I shall not hesitate to place LaFayette alongside Heinlein, Hubbard, Azimov, van Vogt and other greats of STF.—1121 Ann Street, Parkersburg, West Virginia.

Thank you, Mr. Hanrahan. It may amuse you to learn that you have literally placed Rene LaFayette alongside himself among others.

CHEER AND BOO
by Rex E. Ward

Dear Editor: I cannot thank you enough for bringing back Captain Future. For goodness' sake start the series as soon as possible and keep it going as long as possible. I implore you, drop the letter sections. They are absolutely nothing but a waste of space—they ruin an otherwise good magazine. This goes for THRILLING WONDER STORIES too.—305 East Maple Avenue, El Segundo, California.

Okay, Captain Future's back and Joan has got him. We're glad, you're glad, Ed Hamilton's glad and we'll keep him going as long as the said Ed turns in the material. But as for your second and beefier set of sentences—why fie, Master Rex, fie upon you!

Without checking up we must have given space to at least a score of your epistolary perorations in the letter departments of SS and TWS.

So why the sudden kickover? In love? Got a job in a bank? Or what? We remain—

Curious.

TIME ON MY HANDS
by Lewis Sherlock

Dear Editor: The September issue of SS is about par for the course. However, I do wish that occasionally you'd print stories whose explanation (?) I could understand without various assumptions that are mutually exclusive as well as downright confuzin'? No can do?

The Ether Vibrates is the best part of the book as usual, Zeiger, Ph.D., not considered. I assume he proved something to his own satisfaction therein but I have no idea what. The Iowa river is handy, Prof.—suggest you jump in.

It seems that the theory of time travel is becoming one of the active issues in TEV. Excellent, even if so far it is mostly proving each other's theories impossible. Unfortunately, I am too dense even to catch the idea behind most of the theories, let alone the mechanics thereof. Or even what is involved. The multiple time-track deal would require infinite subdivisions of component matter.

This we hope, reduces time to a single track, past to future, although it could be relative for observers at various points in space. Therefore, even assuming hyperspace, going into the past would be impossible because the past no longer exists. Follow me?

In other words, the atoms that were one object two thousand years ago are another now and to travel into the future would be likewise impossible as it also doesn't exist now and when it does exist will be made of the matter existing in various forms now, or matter and energy, if you prefer Einstein to Eddington.

This assumes that the matter in the universe can exist only during the present and the point of time called the present moves along the time track from past to future, even if that track might be a circle, although I can see no reason to assume that it should be, but with curved space, curved time also?

So, we very neatly do away with the whole business by merely proving that only the present can exist at any given time. This is a beautifully simple and compact theory.

However, the experimental work of Prof. Joseph B. Rhine of Duke and other experimenters with precognition throws a king-size monkey wrench into the whole business. Assuming Rhine to be right, as the evidence indicates, then either the future itself or a "Blueprint" of the future must exist now and must have existed since the beginning (?) of time, and extending to the end. If the future actually exists perhaps the past also exists, which is a fine thing—having matter dispersed in time as well as in space.

What such a condition could mean is more than I can postulate or imagine. It would seem to mean that the past, the future and the present are all existing now. If we assume that we cannot change the past because to do so would alter the present from which we start, which seems inevitable if we assume a single time track, then to travel in the future runs into the same trouble.

If a man went into the future and saw an event, then the intervening events would all have to happen to form the basis of the event he saw. If the future is fluid or subject to change, then you can neither travel in it nor make precognitive inquiries into what is yet to be.

To project existing trends beyond the present and guess what will happen in the future is one thing. Precognition of or traveling in the future, and thereby having specific knowledge thereof, is something very much else.

No doubt I am dumb, stupid and ignorant, but why Einstein's theory of relativity should enter into time travel is beyond me. If I understand it at all, it makes time travel impossible by making the speed of light a constant and velocities in excess of that impossible also. Negative time therefore escapes my comprehension.

Why not face the facts? According to accepted theory, time travel is out. Therefore, it must be based on a totally new conception of the nature of the universe if the writers insist on having it at all, not merely on minus signs and time tracks.

Yet Rhine's precognition theory, if accepted, is going to change our ideas on a lot of things. You can't project the future from the present when you guess the order of cards not yet shuffled. We don't get that at all, but what are the facts?

I have got to see an explanation of either Parapsychology or time travel before either makes sense to me. But, dammit, experimental data can hardly be debated. Maybe I am the Champion Chump of the Century. But I've gotta have theories—or proof.—Lubbock, Texas.

You're caught in a time-warp and no fooling, Lew. It is our hunch that Professor Einstein would be the last to say that speed beyond the speed of light is impossible in any final sense. Such speed is impossible only on the basis of such theories as can be devised from the present limitations of knowledge.

But to man of the pre-combustion engine any speed greater than that of, say, the cheetah was incomprehensible. Not too many decades ago learned scientists were sincerely predicting that speeds of more than thirty miles per hour must necessarily be fatal—due to air pressure on the body.

Today man is zooming around at well upwards of a thousand miles per hour in little experimental rocket planes—and the chances are he'll keep increasing his speed as atomic fuels are discovered to release him from gravity. Unthinkable at present is the speed of light for human transportation. But that is by no means saying man may not attain and pass it. He must if he is to reach the stars.

Granted he can pass light-speed, then time travel in some form is upon us—at least in a backward direction. Unless of course either the traveler or the universe vanishes once such speed is reached.

Much of the objection to a solid time stream is egotistical—the apostles of free will scream bloody murder at the thought of a predetermined future. But if men can travel backward in time at some future date, why should we not have some record of their appearance?

The answer of course, is that there is no reason why the we who live in the now should be the we who remain living in some past separated spatially as well as temporally from the Earth of the present. It boils down to multiple or parallel time tracks and if they are hard to understand it does not mean that they may not exist. Now who's getting wound up?

POINT OF INSANITY
by Joe. E. Dean

Deer Sir: Each time I buy a copy of STARTLING I turn to TEV first and there enjoy myself to the utmost. I find old friends like Sneary, Zimmer, the Coles and poor bewildered Welly Brown expressing themselves in their own way, inimitably and delightfully.

Therefore the cruel remarks of one Karl V. Zeiger, Ph.D., in last month's issue enraged me to the point of insanity, particularly since he insisted upon using an overstuffed vocabulary of words I had never before heard, thus irritating my already inflamed inferiority complex. This vain, pompous wolf in creep's clothing said, in effect, that since fans are not competent literary critics their letters should have no place in the body of the magazine.

Now I am the first to admit that many fans are greatly lacking in savoir faire when it comes to writing story revues. Certainly, anyone who becomes ecstatic over the stories of, for example, Abe Merritt, deserves to be shot at sunrise, or even the night before, but not because he or she has written a letter. Why, those missives in fine print with their prejudices and biased opinions, cantering merrily from paragraph to paragraph, are veritable hunks of humanity, warm and quivering and spread out for all the world to see.

How can anyone, even a Ph. D., wish to destroy something so wonderful? Here are people being themselves, publicly, without fear of punishment or reproach. Some, of course, copy or follow the lead of others but they are as easy to spot as they are to ignore. There will always be enough admirers of Henry Kuttner to make the column worth reading.

I am fond of the fans. Even though I know most of them would detest me on sight. I look upon them as my pals.

He who attacks my pals attacks me and I therefore wish to inform Mr. Ph. D. that he is a hypercritical, robot-brained equatapus I have no idea what this is but I feel certain, somehow, that the shoe fits. Fie upon you, Mr. Ph.D.!

To turn to the issue itself, I'd rather not. Henry of the Many Names would have had a good story in "The Portal in the Picture" had he put in more science and fewer mob scenes. We all know and hate the mob but most of us have much to learn when it comes to science—especially pseudo-science, which is so dreadfully unpredictable. Hank's treatment of the yarn, however, was no end clever. The way the hero was pushed about by circumstances was a new and realistic touch.

"The Hothouse Planet" may have been a good story but my opinion of people who put animals in cages is so low that I spent most of my reading time thinking how satisfying would be the crunch of Gerry Carlyle's bones if only she would fall prey to the whip. A mean, aggressive woman, that Carlyle. Her single furtive tear failed to touch my heart. Seriously, the characterization was fine.

"Communications" was interesting but, if the situation hadn't just happened to fit the code so nicely, those guys would have been gone goblins. James has obviously been reading Fletcher Pratt.

Your own editorial, I regret to say, was singularly unedifying. You can do better than that. I remember one you did on logic and theory that was a pip. It coincided exactly with my ideas on the subject. Did you ever see an ego walking? Well, I am.—315 West 33rd Street, New York City.

Okay, and you can keep right on walking, Herr Dean. Seriously, we appreciate an occasional bite, like that of Mr. Ph.D. Zeiger or the nip just offered by Rex E. Ward—if only because of the fine lot of frenetic and retaliatory action it stirs up.

But when you touch our own editorial—well, podnuh, it hurts.

IRRITATED
by Richard F. Dikeman

Dear Editor: In looking through the Sept. TEV I was rather faintly amused, though somewhat irritated by a letter contributed by one Karl V. Zeiger, Ph.D.

Of course it is at once evident that Dr. Zeiger is a highly erudite, thoughtful, even conscientious fellow. However, I feel I must take gentle (I hope) exception to several points contained in the gentleman's letter, which I trust will be taken in the proper spirit.

I might first make a blanket apology on behalf of myself and any other fans whose literary ability and mentality are not what they might be—if, say, we were built more along the lines of a Dr Zeiger. Though unfortunate, even lamentable, this sub-normal condition is, however, not generally painful to the subject.

But you must admit, Dr. Zeiger, that the letters, in fact, are not harmful in themselves. Facetious though they may be, sometimes to the point of inanity, I can see them causing no real distress for the obvious reason that anyone who doesn't care for letters such as these is in no way obligated to read them.

That there are some fans who get a genuine bang out of these rather intimate unaffected scribblings—or laughingly verbose polysyllabic eruditions compounded by college students trying out their intellectual wings, as the case may be—is made plain by the fact that the editor does after all print the darn things and by the fact that so much amiable (??) controversy is evidenced among the fans.

Ye Ed knows his business—you can depend on that. He would not waste the paper on which these letters see print if he didn't believe the majority of readers prefer a letter section. I believe they do.

And surely no one can deny that the reader usually gets his two-bits' worth of fiction and faction in S.S. and T.W.S. I think we must admit we do—at least as compared to many other pulp fiction mags, many of which do not print letters. Therefore by what process of reasoning, I wonder, does one arrive at the conviction that a few pages devoted to readers' letters means that the buyer is getting gypped?

Only one other point. I quote briefly from the good doctor's letter: " . . . pertains to a perpetration of a technical language peculiar to its type." Bearing that in mind, let me quote again: ". . . compatible to the reactions of a laboratory animal with Pavlovian conditioning . . ." Or: ". . . the above to the terminology of sentential logic . . ." Or: ". . . the formulas to a tautology . . ."

I believe these quotations speak for themselves.

And, in regard to Dr. Zeiger's point concerning the ill-organization of fans' letters, may I in closing merely point out that the gentleman repeatad himself as concerns the desirability of and need for separate publication of fan letters not twice but five times in his letter? A little organization of the point of your thesis, Dr. Zeiger, would greatly have helped to preclude this tiring and needless redundancy.—Church Street, Brooktondale, N. Y.

Well, how nice! And here we've been thinking all along that tautology had something to do with a high wire in a circus—against a slack wire, of course. Apparently, although no reading in SS or TWS is compulsory, some readers, like Zeiger and Ward, for instance, seem unable to keep away from the letters, even though most of said letters jangle their nerves like the scraping of a comb on a rough plaster wall.

Do we detect a trace of masochism? We fondly hope so.

CONSPIRACY?
by Frank Smith

Dear Editor: What is this, a conspiracy? A short time ago the Readers Department of one of your competitors was the victim of unmerited assault. Fortunately, it survived. Now comes Mr. Zeiger with his axe under his coat and his eye on the neck of our TEV.

Shoot if you must, our old grey Editor
But spare The Ether Vibrates!!!

Seriously though, separating the authors' contributions from the fans' contributions (and by that I don't mean to imply that they are equal) would be like separating ham and eggs. Please don't do it.—612 Banner Avenue, Brooklyn 24, New York.

We feel defended to the death—our death. And, in tribute to Mr. Smith—as well as in, we hope, the same mood—we say . . .

The old gray Ed, he ain't what he used to be
Many short moons of yore.
Touch not a hair of his bald head
Or he'll biff you in your eye.

PH.D. GANG-UP
by Max M. Goins, Ph.D.

Sir: The one letter in your Sept. ish was worth the purchase price. Said letter being from Karl V. Zeiger. Every point brought out by Mr. Zeiger was true. Most of your contributors write as if they had just been released from a home for people whose minds might be called feeble.

Never have I read such tripe as has appeared in your letter section. Most of the writers seem to be extreme egotists. They write as if we readers bought your mag just to read their infantile attempts at being funny. Some of them even go so far as to advance all kinds of theories on any subject. Most of their explanations are so much jargon.

If one of them had to explain their ideas they wouldn't even know how to start. It is always easier to write high sounding ideas than it is to explain them. I believe if you discontinued your letter section this group of people would quit buying your mag. The only reason they buy it anyway is to have a means to show their ignorance via "ETHER-GRAMS."

It is necessary to have a reader-letter section but this is no excuse for the type of letters you print. If you only printed letters from readers offering advice or criticism and omitting such letters you would be doing a great portion of your readers a great favor. You could use the additional space for a good short or a poem.

Now that that is over, I want to tell you the September issue was tops as for the illustrations. There will never be an artist who can match V. Finlay. The one on page 13 is a masterpiece. Such beauty in a pulp magazine is hard to believe. I haven't read tha story yet but with such illustra-

tions it has to be good. Don't ever lose Finlay. Your lead stories are always good but your shorts are usually no good.

This is my first and my last letter to a magazine. In the future I will just buy your magazine, read it and file it away. If anything does not please me I will just forget it after your mag is filed.—937 Bristol Hwy., Kingsport, Tenn.

Methinks this particular Ph.D. speaks for himself but good—perhaps even better than he realizes. Hereafter we are going to demand certificates before we put letters after the name of any correspondent. We might also demand birth certificates, Social Security numbers, blend of personal perfume, old ration books and nursery school report cards. But this might be making it a trifle complicated to communicate with us.

All who want the letter column as is discontinued, please write us a letter and burn same before sending: We like it the way it is.

MARSH-MADNESS
by Whit Taylor

Dear Editor: I am so mad I could—I could—I could actually burn one of Bergey's covers! (More about Bergey later.) I quote from a letter by Jack Marsh in the Sept. SS. That stuff was okay in the days of the stf supermen and the adventure stories . . . you remember no doubt, Capt. Future, John Carsteirs, Garry Carlyle, etc. Gone. Dead. As is space opera. Let it rest undisturbed in the past.

The nerve of this guy Marsh. (Nothing personal, Jack.) How dare he say Captain Future is of the past. If the Cap is gone, things look dark indeed for the field of science-fiction. Even I, a common Kiwi, who has read only three stories of the heroic Captain, can tell that he is good.

The first story I read was "Magic Moon" by Brett Sterling. This was in the winter Captain Future Magazine in 1944. I enjoyed this so much that I read it over again. The letters from the readers and "The Futuremen" Dept. helped me to understand a bit more of Cap's history. After that I kept a blurred eye peeled for the next issue but never saw any. "Somebody fouled up the works," I thought.

Then in the Spring, 1945, ish of our dear old SS, what appeared but "Red Sun of Danger" by Brett Sterling. I enjoyed this and prayed for more. My prayers weren't answered, however, until Winter, 1946, when "Outlaw World" hit the stands in SS. I noticed that this one was by the original author, Edmond Hamilton, and proceeded to down three jugs of Xeno. The story was good as I had expected, although I think the Sterling novel "Magic Moon" was the best of the three. For all you Future lovers I quote a passage from the letter:

Captain Future leaped into the crumpled interior of the wrecked space cruiser and crouched, his atom pistol in hand.

"Otho, where are you?" he called loudly.

"Here, chief!" answered the android. He was lying, trussed up in heavy bonds, in a corner of the wreck. "They left me to be killed when the wreck crashes."

"And the rats got away from me," hissed Captain Future as he bent to untie the other. "By space, when we catch up to them—"

Ahhhhhhh! To hear Captain Future hiss again! Listen, Ye Eddes. Why not put the Futuremen in their own book again? I don't know why you quit publishing it in the first place unless the Captain was, as Chad Oliver said in a letter, "On a bond selling tour for the duration." Even if that was the case, the duration ended quite a while ago.

Maybe he is stranded on Styx and doesn't know the war is over. Could he still be selling 25-dollar war bonds to the peaceful but ignorant natives for 25 dollars? If this is the case, I wish you would please contact him some way (not by telaudio, as no metals exist on Styx) and tell him to return as all is forgiven.

Get him home to the moon and let him joyfully greet Greg and Otho and Simon Wright (the Brain, to you), Ezra Gurney, and last but certainly not the least, Joan Randall.

I have a request to make of you, Sarge: EITHER PUT CAPTAIN FUTURE BACK IN HIS OWN MAGAZINE OR PUBLISH HIS STORIES IN STARTLING STORIES OR THRILLING WONDER STORIES! Or is it that Ed and Brett aren't writing any more of his stories? If this is the case get to work, you space eaters!

I shall wait in silent remorse for some sign of the Futuremen. Every night I reverently kiss faded newspaper photos of Edmond Hamilton and Brett Sterling and recite "Bring back Captain Future" before retiring. But while this goes on I think of all the novels I have missed. There must have been hundreds written, according to the volume number on the CF mag I have. And this is where you readers can help me.

If you snaggies have ANY old Captain Future mags you want to get rid of I would be glad to pay for them. (The same goes for Ye Eddes.) So you have heard my plea. If you have ANY old CF's, contact me by writing—Whit Taylor, 903 W. Oregon, Urbana, Illinois.

I will be more than happy to hear from you.

I guess I have put across my point. All you Eddes and reader public probably know by now that I want Captain Future back. Now I can write my comment on your magazine, STARTLING STORIES. I have never been startled but I have enjoyed most of the stories that I have read. Not all of them are good but you have to expect that I guess. Try and get as many good ones in as possible and keep out the 2nd Raters.

Now about the illustrations. Contrary to the common belief that Earle Bergey is frightful (at least that's the impression after reading some of your readers' letters) I think that he turns out very good pictures when he wants to. The July cover was excellent! More like that one, Earle. It looked more like a color photograph than a painting.

But the new cover. This one is more on the two-dimensional side. Our boy Earle must have mixed his Wheaties with Xeno for this one! But it was passable as covers go. A friend of mine, upon seeing an old ish of SS with a typical Bergey masterpiece on it, had this to say: (quote) Gahhhhhhhh! (unquote). But my friend is stupid. I'm not. (I don't care what others tell you.) 'Nuff said about Bergey.

As for the inside drawings, Virgil Finlay and the fellow that illustrated "Fire in the Heavens" (didn't see his name) are the best. They had depth to their work. Speaking of depth, I think I'm getting in too deep for my own good, so I'll sign off. I suppose I'll keep on reading your magazine because I like stf and (I hate to admit it) SS is tops in this field.—903 West Oregon, Urbana, Illinois.

Once again, Captain Future, Joan Randall, the Brain, Grag, Otho and the whole more-or-less merry tribe are back if in somewhat curtailed form, as you have undoubtedly gathered by this time. As for the other illustrator, 'twas Vern Stevens and very good too.

PRAISE AND CONDEMNATION?
by R. P. F. Bailey

Dear Editor: This is not written as a letter of praise or condemnation of the present issue (September, 1949) of STARTLING STORIES, although it was the sight of that mag which started me off on this missive. I can only say in passing that the mag was mediocre as usual.

I am making a plea for an editorial policy readjustment. A great number of fans have been commenting recently on the improvement in TWS and SS. I have boiled down their comments and arrived at the conclusion that this general approval and air of expectancy is solely due to the inclusion of Rene LaFayette's series, Willy Ley's articles and such tales as van Vogt's THE WEAPON SHOPS OF ISHER.

The point I am trying to make is that fans appreciate pure science fiction based on the extension of present-day knowledge into the probable future and are hoping that SS and TWS will develop along these lines. I think you should do away with most of the space operas which you run (the 3g type) and also with those mixtures of magic and pseudo-science which are becoming horribly boring and have been played to death.

Above all, please drop the "science cum fantasy cum magic through the dimensions" type of space opera which has been worked to the bone in recent years. Van Vogt's ISHER novel was a step in the right direction. I cannot justify the excellent mature editorial and letter column with the majority of the rest of the mag and can only conclude that the editor has very little control over his mag's policy. —14 Market Place, Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire, England.

You belong to a well-defined and articulate minority among our readers, Mr. Bailey—one which sees in science fiction chiefly an opportunity for authors of scientific training to give modern science an imaginative kicking around with an eye to your

"probable future."

Well, we run such stories—a good many more than we ran in the old days. But our tastes and we believe the tastes of our readers are, on the whole, a great deal more catholic. For while the deviation of an electronic pattern may be wildly exciting to someone who has had nuclear training it is more apt to be a leap into the yawning pit of ennui for a less specialized reader.

To reverse the theorem—a reader who is more mystically inclined will be stirred and excited by some abstract idea which sends the little shivers sprinting up his cervical vertebra, while those of the scientist remain unquiveringly still. It is our job to hit both extremes with at least some of our stories, as well as the great amorphous mass of Joes and Janes between them. And it is this mass which is really the most important—for it is they who comprise the bulk of our circulation.

As for our control over the magazine, perhaps it is far from total—there *are* publishers, you know. But in the by and large we are responsible for what goes into TWS and SS and no one else.

Since its founding eleven years ago, this magazine has had three editors and it is our belief that each of us has impregnated SS with his stamp while he sat in the chair. A check through our back issues, if only through THE ETHER VIBRATES, should make this evident. So don't ask us to pass any bucks. We shan't, let the brickbats fall where they may.

We have no desire to imitate any other magazine or to seek to reclaim any so-called hey-days or golden ages. We have a hunch the true golden age of science fiction lies immediately before us and are delighted to have such an active association with such a live field—a field which ranges all the way from gremlins to mesons, no matter what extremists may attempt to prove.

FANACTIVITY
by William D. Knapheide

Dear Editor: As I have completed reading the September issue of STARTLING, I shall proceed to rate the stories as to how they appealed to me.

First place goes to "The Hothouse Planet" by A. K. Barnes. It is easy to see why it is in the Hall of Fame.

Second place goes to "The Portal in the Picture" by H. Kuttner. This is the first GOOD science fiction yarn by Kuttner since 1940 in my opinion.

Third place goes to "The Fires Within" by A. C. Clarke. A very good author, we should see more novels by him.

Fourth place goes to "A Condition of Beauty" by J. D. MacDonald. A very promising author.

Fifth place to "Communications" by E. James. Passable.

Sixth place to "Beyond the Black Nebula" by R. LaFayette. This idea should have been used in a longer story as it is too cramped as it is.

I also enjoyed all the features as usual.

I have just received my copy of the Bloomington News Letter and I notice on page 5 where the National Fantasy Fan Federation proposes that its members choose future convention sites by mail in place of the present method of bidding from the floor for convention sites. I believe that this system would not be fair for the following reasons:

(1) All of the participants in fandom do not belong to the NFFF.

(2) It would bar other national and international fan clubs from having a voice as to the convention sites. Clubs such as FAPA, Universal Musketeers and others of international and national scope would not have a voice in the selection of sites.

(3) The proposal by its very nature is monopolistic and does not conform to democratic principles.

I should appreciate any comments made on this NFFF -proposal.—P. O. Box No. 86B, San Francisco, California.

The answer to this one is simple. At the next convention, if they have not already done so at Cincinnati, have arrangements made for a central registration of all science fiction fan groups under a non-affiliated listing. Let all fan groups register by a certain date and send in their convention preferences. Then let the registrars select those cities which show sufficient representation to warrant a place on a ballot, send the ballot to all the groups and let the final result stand.

Such a plan would require only reasonably fast action to be effective—say a final result to be announced before the end of the year—to let convention machinery and financing get sufficient leeway. It would avoid floor brawls and be representative at one and the same time. To this end, why not have some sort of a non-affiliated central fan board and chairman be appointed and voted in at the next convention.

Or, perhaps better, have the fan group of the city which has just held the convention take over arrangements for the next. It could easily be arranged to avoid a self-repeating monopoly. And it would give the local groups a chance to make their own choices known in the preliminary registration.

This makes sense to us. How about it, fans?

THE BEST OF EVERYTHING
by Richard R. Smith

Dear Editor: Do you mind if I indulge in a little praise? THRILLING WONDER STORIES and STARTLING STORIES are the two best magazines on the whole science-fiction market. You got the best of everything, chums.

"The Portal in the Picture" is something of a masterpiece. The humor was real and not forced as per the hot dog selling Orig Prem. The characterization was superb. In fact, I don't think I shall ever forget the cigaretta-lighter-lighting Eddie Burton. The plot was magnificent. But the background was missing. Eddie walks from the temple to the bath-house and back to the temple. And nothing is told of all the rest of the city of Malesca. This one minor point lessens the solidness of Malesca but who cares? The story was perfect as it was.

Is there a psychical research foundation that issues pamphlets? I think I remember reading something about them. I mean the boys who throw dice and . . . (I can't think of the right words to finish that sentence—anyway, stuff about telekinesis, et al). If there is such an organization, I would like to subscribe to their literature (if someone will kindly tell me how) and make a few contributions of my own (if they are interested).

Because "Mighty Man Smith" has been having dreams from the future. Nothing sensational but at least two defi-

nite dreams that were not caused by repressions of desires or fear from the conscious mind in the past. But which were caused by realizations of desires and fears repressed from the future into the past from the conscious mind to the past subconscious mind.

Catch? It's simple: in the past, my subconscious had a desire for luxury which had been repressed from the conscious mind (everyone has a desire for luxury unless he is a bem). Sometime in the future, my conscious mind repressed a feeling of luxury (because it was unpleasant, psychologically) into the subconscious. Positive and negative something or others (emotions or desires or whatheveyou—it don't matter) attracted and I had a dream of something before it happened.

The dream I recorded (the smoking of a cigar). Previously, I had never smoked a cigar or feared to smoke one or desired to smoke one (which rules out past influences and causes—don't take my word, just ask Freud or Einstein). That leaves the future influences.

Take my word for it—I have had a dream from the future, perhaps countless others have. You know what that means? Fate, I says. By our past actions, we are rewarded by certain future events which are unavoidable. Because, I couldn't have had the dream in the past from the future unless I was somehow going to have that "Cause" no matter what. Catch?

Which projects a problem. Suppose one can deduct his "reward" for past actions after learning they were unavoidable after having a dream from the future? I mean after learning that the event in the future was unavoidable. (In my case, the smoking of the cigar was not the reward, but the event which would lead to a subsequent reward.)

And suppose the person refuses the "reward."

I have queer ideas, don't I? Anyway, the Bible says: "Blessed are the meek—they shall inherit the Earth." The Meek, by their past actions earn the "earth," which is relative, to be given to them in the future, natcherly. Also, the Bible says something about throwing crumbs or something on the ocean and loaves will come back. (It does, doesn't it?) You see, past actions are rewarded by future events which are unavoidable to a certain extent. It's fate. Also, remember what the Bible says, "Do unto others as you would have others do unto you." The reason for such a golden rule is obvious when you consider the "reaction" element. Also, "love" is a "Reaction" element, etc.

Anyway, I have concluded that there are no definite "rewards" but variables. Everyone can pick his own variables to some extent. I am passing up my "reward" (for being very meek, incidentally: I quote, "The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth") for a variable: to be a writer of science-fiction! —6 East 44th Street, Wilmington, Del.

And are you asking for it, Dreamer Smith! You and your big black cigar! A couple of weeks ago we had a dream about a bottle of champagne and, lo and behold, a couple of days later (it was somebody's birthday, not ours) we went out and bought one and drank it. We got our just reward too in the form of a monumental ice-pack. This, perhaps, is a sublimation of ice-pick, which is probably what should have been stuck through our aching head. We'd have welcomed it then—and that was no dream.

If you want to write science fiction, do so and claim your reward. Come to think of it you have, although perhaps the rewards (not Rex) have been small to date. How those rejection slips can and do pile up. In our reasonably long career we have known only one author who never got a rejection slip and he, oddly enough, has never seemed to care much for fiction writing, preferring to be a rewrite man and, currently, managing editor of a large Hearst newspaper. Sometimes it makes us a little ill and we dream of bottles of champagne and then . . . it's a vicious circle.

TIDY
by Felice Perew

Dear Editor: Your September issue is the first magazine of science fiction I have ever read. Herewith find my questions and comments ('scuse please—my mother's a legal secretary).

Cover's good—but for a gal in danger her hair looks pretty tidy to me. Good work—but I can't locate the name of the artist.

Contents—how about printing the number of words? I always read the shortest first.

The Ether Vibrates—oh, those poor wheels! Very good, especially the readers' column, which I shall take up later.

THE PORTAL IN THE PICTURE—wonderful! Does Mr. Kuttner write his story or pick his title first (I always have trouble with my titles). How about a sequel—maybe Eddie and Lorna go back to Malesca, where her innate nature is tamed down so Eddie can stand her or something. The story ended much too soon—I could have read on forever.

A CONDITION OF BEAUTY—very good. Do Pol and Lee make it back to Earth? Do they forget how "ugly" they are? Tune in next issue for the exciting end of this story (I hope!).

THE HOTHOUSE PLANET—I knew the title but never read the story before. In the letters I heard mention of a Hall of Fame and turned to see which story it was. Lo and Behold! This is a very good idea.

COMMUNICATIONS—good, but better if shorter. Did the System of Procyon win the war, Mr. James?

THE FIRES WITHIN—very good and rates a sequel.

BEYOND THE BLACK NEBULA—good but the illustration has me puzzled. Was there a girl in it? I couldn't find her. Was she only the spirit of space?

THE ROAD TO SPACE TRAVEL—appears to be a very long road indeed. Very good.

[*Turn page*]

IS IT SAFE TO SEE INTO THE FUTURE?

That's the question facing Danny Caiden when his "Wild Talents" run counter to the plans of a psychic monopoly!

LET THE FINDER BEWARE

A Complete Novel by JAMES BLISH

Featured in the December Issue of—

THRILLING WONDER STORIES

NOW ON SALE—25c PER COPY AT ALL STANDS!

And now for the letters. I refuse to criticize any of them—they were all good as far as I know, although I can't understand the more technical ones. What does stf mean? If it was st I'd guess science fiction but—? Although Les and Es Coles' letter left me a trifle dizzy I thought it was very good. Now if either of these two can explain it I think it will be equal to one of the miracles in THE PORTAL.

I think your replies are awfully cute and the title of the letter by Edward N. McKeown was especially funny and apt. I'm glad Toni Gabriel's sold—I am too. Dear M. Tilger—I don't care if time travel is impossible. I want more of it. It will be a relief to read something impossible—some of your SS stories are so probable they scare me, especially PORTAL.

I've always had a town in my mind something like Malesca—Alana is its name and it is much smaller. I know almost all the people (I should say characters, because a couple are horses but I've found the horses are people too). They are bad and good, just as the Malescans. I've known Alana since I was five (I'm fourteen now) and I could draw a map of it blindfolded. I'm always thinking, "Maybe I'll find it someday." I'm going to write a story about it and its people sometime—especially Rusty, the big bay horse and Windy, the black (Son of the Wind, to you). Does Mr. Kuttner actually have a dictionary of Malescan? I'd like to learn it.—2860 Dartmouth Avenue, St. Petersburg, Florida.

Thanks, Felice, for what is undoubtedly the most charming letter of the issue. Methinks perhaps you have the beginning of a writer's imagination—we hope so because it is a wonderful thing to develop in spite of the inevitable headaches, heartache, pitfalls, et cetera, along the way.

But to take you up in order as it were—Yes, the girl has a right tidy head of hair. As for printing the number of words, we can't add. Your story comments lead us to the belief that you are just a trifle sequel-happy. How series can you get?

Call us anything you want to but "cute." We detest the word except in its correct or sly connotation. We also consider the horse happily obsolete. Perhaps Mr. Kuttner will send you a copy of his Malescan dictionary whenever he gets around to writing it.

For the rest, we welcome a very voluble and interesting new fan to the fold.

NOTE FROM BLOOMINGTON
by Bob Wilson Arthur Tucker

Cheerio: Has it occurred to you or to Henry Kuttner that his September novel, THE PORTAL IN THE PICTURE, would make a good book? He and his agent should give considerable thought to the idea (if they have not already done so), for I believe this story to be right down the imaginative alley the big book publishers have been searching lately. And it is certainly a better yarn than some of the forthcoming titles that have been announced by the publishers.

It was happy news to learn too that last year's number-one novel, WHAT MAD UNIVERSE? is coming in book form this winter. I'd venture to say that in the future when publishers begin rounding up the best novels of the past years, UNIVERSE will wind up in the top ten.

May you keep on printing novels worthy of book publication, and may the bookmen keep on picking your novels.—P. O. Box No. 260, Bloomington, Illinois.

Okay and thanks, Bob. It's nice to get praise from one of the few fan-author-bookman species in existence. Is that why the triptych of first names on the letterhead? We have agreed whole-heartedly on the Fred Brown opus in question since we first saw it in manuscript nearly two years ago. In its peculiar and particular field it is to our way of thinking a perfect story. May you and ourselves come up someday with something half as good in the fields we select.

HOW TO BE A BETTER MAGAZINE
by Jonathan Saville

Dear Editor: It really is a shame. "Startling Stories" is the first science-fiction magazine that I've run across in many a year. The way I see it, nobody at all should read your magazine. The ordinary reader picks it up, looks through it, decides it's too hard for him and never buys it again. The science-fictionear, on the other hand, takes one look at the cover, and bypasses it completely. Don't ask how I got hold of an issue; I found it lying on a park bench.

I'm not asking you to change the quality of the stories; they're good enough already. What I do want can be summed up as follows:

1. Change the title. S. F., that is good s. f. is not startling, nor amazing, nor astounding, fantastic, nor any other of the adjectives found on magazine covers.

2. Change the covers. Scantily dressed women, horrible monsters, handsome heroes rushing to the rescue, all are definitely passe to an intelligent science-fiction reader. Besides, those covers are misleading. Some people, guided by the cover, buy SS expecting to find in it the trash one ordinarily does find in a publication exhibiting that type of advertisement. They get disappointed because they find really good stuff inside Science-fiction readers expect the same thing and so they don't sample it. By all means, change the covers. No matter how you do it it will be a change for the better; it couldn't get worse.

3. Cut out all that junk in the "Ethergrams." Such things as, "And so, (heh, heh) PIE-eyes, we close with the enjoinder to listen in next month and hear, 'Jack's Adventures in Extra-Terrestrial Geomorphology'," should find no place in a magazine of your obvious calibre. If you got rid of that rot, then maybe you'd find space to print the good letters in a readable print size instead of the micro-film size they now come in. Letters like those of Sylvester Brown, Jr., Karl V. Zeiger, Ph.D. (with whom, by the way, I agree completely), Rickey Slovin, etc., in the September issue, are the only ones that should be included.

4. Lengthen the editorials and the articles. I said lengthen, not improve. I don't think that can be done.

And that's that.—1006 Gerard Avenue, New York 52, New York.

And that, Mr. Saville, is what you think. Needless to say our lips are sealed.

STRAIGHT CRIT
by John W. Jakes

Dear Editor: Just finished the excellent September issue. Here's my commentary (such as it is) on the whole mag.

Stories, in order of preference:

1. THE PORTAL IN THE PICTURE. Good old HK's novel takes top honors Well written, with the author's usual insight into the thoughts of his characters that makes a story live. Of course, Eddie Burton was the only one whose mind the reader really explored, but through him the character of others in the story became very real. The only fault, I thought, was slight. His images and names, i. e., "Malesca—the blood red city, etc.," were not as vivid as his "Time Axis." Best examples of this, in recent issues, were "Flight Into Yesterday" and "Sea Kings of Mars" in TWS. Congrats, HK!

2. THE HOT HOUSE PLANET. Although this is a typical "space opera" and not wonderfully distinguished in style, it held interest. Far above the rest of the stories, I'm sorry to say. When a space-opera takes second, things are slipping.

3. A CONDITION OF BEAUTY. Another little MacDonald Five-Minute Masterpiece. Especially good last line.

4. BEYOND THE BLACK NEBULA. Fairly good. Anthony Twain was a perfect example in fiction of the way the American public treats celebrities in real life. Unfortunately, however, I don't like out-and-out gangsters in stf.

5. THE FIRES WITHIN. Interesting idea but spoiled to my way of thinking by one of these "confidential report" or "sciantic statement" methods of relating a story. They are a rather outdated way of treating an stf tale.

6. COMMUNICATIONS. Again, this story had an excellent idea but fell down on such things as "pacing the room SAVAGELY" and the stereotyped portrayal of a Congressman. (A Solar one to boot.) You know, I have never read an stf story in which a Congressman or some such government

representative was not made into a leering, sneering villain. I'd be interested in knowing if there are any such stories still living. Might be fun to read one for a change.

Just this about the illustrations:

Astarita grows better every day. His pictures have a certain sweep that adds immeasurably to a story.

On the bad side the cover was slightly insipid. Not the usual lurid Bergey which I love! This time, I had to look twice for "Startling Stories" on my newsstand.

Keep up the good work.—5300 Glenwood Avenue, Chicago 40, Illinois.

Nice letter. Hey, we just remembered—Felice Perew, a way back, wanted to know what stf meant. Felice, it does mean science fiction if by a slightly roundabout route. Some years ago someone coined a combination word for it—namely, "scientifiction"—which was even adopted by so august a Nestor of letters as Clifton Fadiman, then reviewing books for the New Yorker as well as conducting "Information Please" on the radio.

The rather awkward word has since fallen more or less into disuse. But the initials *stf*, being a bit more satisfying a mouthful than *sf*, have survived. Quod erat demonstrandum.

PASSING STRANGE
by Dan Marsh

Your Excellency: I have a humble request to make. RETURN STRANGE STORIES!!!!!!! Oh horrors, I am undone. Please, I beg of thee, stop thy screeching and roaring and gnashing of teeth. I know, I know, of course. A third magazine is impossible. The editor whom I address should not have to stoop so low as to edit more than two bi-monthlies!

All kidding aside now, I realize there may be many difficulties of which I am unaware, but do you think the return of STRANGE STORIES could be possible? It contained a type of fiction between science-fiction, fantasy, weird and occult fiction that is found in no other magazine.

Many of your readers want to see CAPTAIN FUTURE revived. Why not have CF and STRANGE combined into one mag? I would like to see this even if it would have to be a 116-page quarterly. But if even this is impossible, maybe you could make a section in STARTLING or TWS for one or more strange stories in each issue—similar to the Hall of Fame.

In case this sees print (which I doubt) I have something to say to the readers. I should like to correspond with anyone interested in stf and/or nature study, occultism, exploring, forestry, botany or board games such as chess and backgammon.—505 Vine St., Jonesboro, Ark.

The story of STRANGE STORIES is indeed a passing strange one. Between the February, 1939, inaugural of this magazine and its January, 1941, demise, we put out thirteen issues of this magazine, devoted to the bizarre, the supernatural, the occult.

Certainly its contents pages read like a Who's Who of authors specializing in these off-trail subjects. A glance at the by-lines reveals Robert Bloch, August Derleth, Keith Hammond, Manly Wade Wellman, Henry Kuttner, Ralph Milne Farley, Otis Adelbert Kline, Frank Belknap Long, Mark Schorer, C. L. Moore, Dr. David H. Keller, E. Hoffmann Price, John Clemons, Will Garth, A. Hyatt Verrill, Carl Jacobi, Eli Colter, Carol Boyd, John Beynon Harris, Ray Cummings, Eric Frank Russell, Dorothy Quick, Lloyd Arthur Eshbach, Arthur J. Burks, Norman A. Daniels, Leigh Brackett, Don Tracy, Seabury Quinn, Oscar J. Friend, Charles S. Strong, Alexander Samalman, Wyatt Blassingame and Maria Moravsky among others.

But for some reason, though it won critical acclaim, the magazine never caught on. Why, heaven only knows, for we have never been able to figure it out. It has remained mercifully extinct lo, these nine long years and will almost certainly remain so.

Anyway, thanks for writing about it. Sorry we can't give you more encouraging news.

WHERE, OH WHERE . . . ?
by Jack Marsh

Sir Ed of Startling: Have the old knights died? Have they been buried in the tomb of fans who have come and gone again?

Where is Sir Rick of Sneary? Where is the all-high King Kennedy of JoKa? Has Hyde returned to the sanctuary of Jekyll? Where are our brave, fearless ones whose letters blasted without shame in the satyrical style that lowly Karl of the Zeiger detests?

Letters now are stiff and formal . . . by professors and superbrains! Bah! Always a long string of analyses. Do you pitch all letters of humor into ye olde furnace where dwells the Earl of Bergey, dancing in ecstasy, his long black robe writhing about over his scarlet zipper suit . . . and the hand of Bergey carries on, forever painting naked fems and purple BEMS.

Or have our dear comedians quit, finally exhausted after years of pounding out compliments and complaints to you and other eds? How sad.

Well (deep subject, wot?), if that's the case, I have but one comment: Tkg vl bnnddn drvod skvyll Translation from Sgigtonian: The Ether Vibrates is now no good and should be left out of the mag! Hooray for humor!—505 Vine St., Jonesboro, Ark.

Well, you certainly are doing your bit, Marsh II. We do seem to be in a bit of a mezzanine—but not from throwing the wacky ones into the wastebasket. We love 'em too.

It has happened before, for letter fandom is always in a state of turnover and periodically turns its face to the wall and goes to sleep. However, it always rolls the other way ultimately—which is one of the reasons we'll keep it going. Braid the toes, cross the fingers and hold on tight, which is no mean gymnastic feat in itself.

COLE SORES
by Les & Es Cole

Dear Old Snark: We've just finished the Sept. issue and feel a definite desire—nay, compulsion is the word—to descend to the depths of penpalism. With your indulgence we proceed.

To such as Dirk Schaeffer and Marion Spoelstra we say, "Can that cr—." Political considerations are as important to science fiction authors as gadgets are. Very few of 'em realize it, though, and that's why you have so few good authors in the field. A brief perusal of Heinlein's work, for instance, will reveal what we mean.

Which is a nice lead into a few things we've a mind to say. In fact, we will say them.

Biopolitics is a new science. (We just made it up!) However, it is merely an extension of ideas which have been kicking around for quite a while now. It is based on these ideas:

1. Man is an organism, an animal.

Yeah, we know, you knew that all along. You may have realized it "intellectually," but do you realize it "emotionally"? We bet not. We could discuss that point for hours. For instance, what we call the "death trauma" has exerted a basic influence upon man ever since he became one. The death trauma, as we define it, is the ever-present all-pervading fear of death present in H. sapiens. Because of the inability or lack of desire of the species to acknowledge the state of being an animal, the death trauma has resulted in a consequent state of racial immaturity, again, as we define it. But we digress

2. Man is a second-order evolution animal.

Animals may be classified as to their order of evolution or degree of integration. The evolutionary order runs something like this:

First order—cells or colonies of cells.

Second order—aggregates of polymorphic cells. That's us, along with antelopes, birds, Brontosauri, Titanotheres, etc. Individuals are called zooids.

Third order—aggregates of polymorphic zooids as in ants, termites, etc. Now, it immediately becomes apparent that man hasn't reached the highest recognized order of evolution—yet. And note also that we do not state that the highest order is the desideratum. We don't wish to indulge in an abstract philosophical discussion of "good" or "undesirable."

3. Man, as an animal, is subject to the natural conditions under which all animals exist.

We hold out some hope here but not much. Certainly man has been able to exert and now exerts more control over his environment than any other animal we know of to date. A word of caution: that doesn't necessarily mean that man is special. Until H. sapiens supersedad him, H. neanderthalensis was a pretty hot cookie. Unfortunately the Neanderthals today are as defunct, kaput and, in general, extinct as man will probably be tomorrow. But man may be able to accomplish two things—and again notice that we make no statement about the value—namely, the prolongation of the life span of the individual and of the race as a whole.

The above discussions are, in a nutshell, the background of biopolitics

In the light of that background material certain trends become very interesting. At the risk of being called communists—State Senator Tanney has already done the honors! (Local gag for Californians)—we would like to discuss, briefly, the purely theoretical aspects of the economics of politics. In so doing we realize we lay ourselves open to a label which is far worse, in our opinion, than being called "red." The label we refer to is, of course, "Aristotelianists."

At the two "ends" of the politico-economic hierarchy are communism and fascism. Because of sloppy thinking and writing, these two systems are often confused. Actually, their economic aims are considerably different. (Ah, ah! This is a theoretical discussion.) Not only that, but these systems are not ends in themselves. The expressed aim of Marx was not communism but (gasp!) anarchy. The aim of fascism, while we've never seen it expressed, must be toward a status of doubleplus fascism, superfascism, eka-fascism, or call it what you will. (While we're on the subject we urgently suggest all readers get hold of a copy of "1984." The book gives a lovely picture of that development of fascism.) And since we've given ourselves permission we'll call that eka-fascist state the nearest approach to third order evolution humans could make

So we have a trend. Will man evolve towards third order evolution (a very efficient state) and, as a consequence, become politically superfascist? We don't know, biopolitics is too young to supply that answer, but we fervently hope not. Even anarchy is more pleasing to our individualist palates.

Wallah! We now discuss the case of Virginia L. Shawl. Good! Excellent! Ginger has a strong argument, and we appreciate it. We realize that such a discussion as we've just indulged in is the very thing she's trying to nail. But if you're still with us, Ginny, we'd like to try to answer you.

Granted that "Science-fiction as yet is primarily fiction." However, science fiction is written primarily for people interested in science. Enjoyment of this type of literature may be based upon where the emphasis in the name is placed; i.e., science fiction, science fiction or science fiction. We humbly point out, Virginia, that there are other groups reading the mag besides your own.

Finally, to Jack Marsh we would suggest that an excellent discussion of dimensions (or preferably, manifolds) may be found in "Mathematics and the Imagination" by Kasner and Newman.

May we ask whether the ratings of the stories we (fans in general) send in are of any use to you? What we mean is we don't rate or comment on the stories just to make clever remarks. We do it with a view to letting you know what we think of the material you're presenting. The Coles personally find fan ratings quite boring—we skip 'em in TEV—and assume that condition is a general one in fandom. So—Earley and Smith are right. Give us a rating chart of some sort! We insist! Or are you just gonna be dictatorial about the whole thing.

This month's ratings (given under the impression—possibly mistaken—that they may be useful to the editor) are: "Medicine and Space Travel" (Ley), "Beyond the Black Nebula" (LaFayette) and "Hot House Planet" (Barnes).—1616 Costa Ave., Richmond, Calif.

We'll skip your thoroughly intelligent, interesting—nay, fascinating—discussion of geo-politics and your shining new F.O.B. science, biopolitics, for the simple and amazing reason that by and large we find ourselves in some agreement with you for once. Likewise your not-so-int.-int.-etc.-remarks on reader crits and the like.

What you have stirred us up to is a somewhat semantical discussion of the meaning of the words science fiction. And that in itself is a controversial dilly. You say "science fiction is written primarily for people interested in science." And you are right—as far as you go.

But the term has widened, in interesting parallel to the words "detective story" to cover a far wider field, connected with science by the thinnest of umbilical cords if connected at all. Just as the detective story, in its pristine form, meant a story in which the detective was the chief protagonist and as such dealt with the crime puzzle only from his point of view, so the science fiction story, originally, dealt with the doings of science and scientists to the exclusion of other interests.

The only covering phrase we can think of was once employed by the late Irvin S. Cobb in giving title to a humorous guide book about New York City. He called his little volume "New York—Once the Home of the Six Nations—Now Look at It."

Look at what now comes under the heading of detective stories. There are tales of violence with virtually no detectives, tales of mystery with ditto, tales of suspense (which means the author was too stupid or too lazy to conceal his killer until the finale), tales of love with slight melodramatic dishes on the side, tales of—you name 'em.

Likewise, science fiction. And this broadening of the field is a healthy sign. Granted, fantasy, the macabre and such have little to do with science. But even in its purest sense science fiction is fantasy wearing a tight girdle. Selah!

FENAPPEAL
by Everett Allen

Dear Editor: Myomy! A real good issue, all the way from A to Izzard! Or so it seems to me. . . . The September STARTLING, I mean. The stories left me no complaint and since I'd read one of Mr. Ley's books on rockets at the library lately his article was right in the groove.

Now to the real purpose of this letter, however. A new fangroup is in process of formation. At present we have possibly a score of actifen, with a total of roughly 55 names on the list that we've painstakingly culled from fan letter columns in the prozines of recent issues, and other sources. Now, we can't hope to contact all fen in our area (all Florida, Central and South America and adjacent islands for

write-in fan and fanzine subscribers), as the magazines disappear from the newsstands faster than we can hope to look for fen. We'd appreciate it very much if you could print this request for fen in the above-mentioned area to write the undersigned for dope on the club.

We're working on the first issue of the fanzine, with editorial material under the direction of Bill Entrekin, also the guiding genius of the group, and art work sailing under the Ronnie Scholar aegis. . . . By the way, Mr. Editor, we hope to have the first issue ready for your approval (we hope) in the next couple of weeks, and we're open for material from anyone who has a good short story or article, verse or art work. Send same either to me, or Bill Entrekin, Jr., 786 Northwest Thirteenth Avenue, Miami 35, Florida. Fen or contributors anywhere welcome but we especially emphasize the area I've mentioned above.—1735 N.W. 1st Street, Miami 35, Florida.

Stew-dents? Let's inundate the unfortunate neophyte.

LETTER FROM LUBEC
by Ed Cox

Dear Editor: Here's my monthly epistle for what good or bad it may be worth to you.

First, the cover. I notice two outstanding items. One is a distinct absence of the thick mists of Venus as described in the story. Two, Bergey put a shock absorber on the girl's weapon there. Just happened to notice it. Detailed he's getting yet!

"The Portal in the Picture" was a thoroughly enjoyable novel. Still not up to the grandiose heights of some of his previous SS novels, this was enjoyable with its interesting basic idea, the little nips here and there at some of today's ways and customs, the humor and so on. Maybe the hero's name being "Eddie" had something to do with it too.

"The Hot House Planet" was okay. That is, it was readable and served its purpose—but if I had previously read it, it would've been space wasted.

"Communications" was good, as good as the above novelette in fact. Is Edwin James real or a pen-name. This style used in the story reminded me strongly of Jenkins' Leinster-style.

MacDonald turned out a nice little short although not anthology material. Clarke, while doing all right, isn't quite like his previous nostalgic self of the waning quiet scenes of the far future. I'll always think of Clarke and his far-future stories as synonymous. The other short I didn't read.

Hubbard should go back to writing the way he used to. Write something thrilling and breath-taking. Or grimly terrible and hard-hitting. Not the dry and boresome tales like the first of this series. Those first ones have discouraged my reading of these last two or three.

There you have my opinions of the current crop. Not that they are much, but as Virginia Shawl asserts, they are average, written because my interest in the stories and the magazine is a bit more active than the greater majority of readers. Many have the same ideas and interest to varying extremes . . . and the middle section. The average.

Now I do happen to be one of the "inner-circle" (I guess) fans. But I do not in any way believe that non-actifans are ". . . lost souls . . ." ". . . eternally damned . . ." and other such ridiculous ideas. I don't choose to try to swing others to my way of enjoying a hobby. There are those who do believe in that but not me.

However, I do not think fans are mentally immature, as one Karl V. Zeiger, Ph.D., seems to think. You see, I side with Virginia Shawl in that people can live averagely and enjoy life. Even fanst To Mr. Zeiger, Ph.D., I say, everyone can not be an intellectual giant, soaring in lofty circles above the average, the ones who must be content in their average but usually enjoyable lives.

Too bad we all aren't Ph.D.'s, B.A.'s and so on that letter columns could be even more stimulating to scientific thought and discussion than the scientific journals. Come now, Mr. Zeiger, you must admit that we all can't make like college professors or even college students. The human race is supposedly born equal.

That is mostly true, however, the script after the entrance onto this stage that is the world is not always impartial. People get all kinds of breaks, good and bad. All aren't able to rise into a state of calm cool collected intellectual superiority. So long live us middle, average guys and gals who make the world go 'round.

Let the fans, people who show an interest better than average in the literature (which point is becoming less disputable yearly) known as science-fiction. Those who write average letters of comment, inspired by a warm glow of satisfaction or a niggling sense of dissatisfaction about some point or story in their favorite magazines.

To us these little things are a hobby and pastime of enjoyment, intellectual pursuit in the more advanced stages of being a fan and the pleasure and satisfaction of making and being friends with fellow enthusiasts. It all centers about the letters which the publishers and editors see fit to print, who feel that the space used is worth it in good will promoted between magazine and the not-too-small number of actively interested readers.

So what if the letters aren't all glowing epistles of scientific discussion and the rest that you seem to desire if there are to be any letters at all. You sort of overstepped yourself, Mr. Zeiger, and are rather out-of-place here. Let's rally round the Banner of Shawl! Leave Mr. Zeiger and his fellows who every once in a while come into our typically American back-room sessions to complain and try to change or do away completely. We can't all be satisfied but the majority seems to be. Mr. Zeiger is in the minority.

So now I'll end this letter, which if compared with the letters of the years in SS or TWS, is just another average letter, doing much the same as any other person would do and has done under the circumstances.

Hope to see le Brackett back in much length soon. Glad to see Cliff Simak's name in the future line-up as well as Hubbard under his own name. Things look bright all around. So until next issue, your sincere reader-fan (Maine's most enthusiastic TWSS reader) signs off.—4 Spring Street, Lubec, Maine.

Oh, Shawl, Ed, don't take it so to heart. We can see and like Zeiger's side of it as well as your own. And we have no intention of turning this peristyle into a close-knit and consciously superior nesting place for egg-laying intellectuals. Shades of the Fatu Liva! We don't think we could sit on them very long ourselves.

What we like is diversity and plenty of it. And oddly enough or otherwise, we seem to get it.

EXTREMITIES
by Eugene DeWeese

Dear Editor: I hope you get this. There were so many addresses at the bottom of your contents page I don't know if I used the right one. Hope so.

Wo' happen to vanVogt (Project Spaceship). The only reason I kept on reading it was because I had faith in him and thought that it would get better as it went. That story and one in one of your, excuse the expression, competitor's mags seemed to be more of a discourse on human faults than sf. Not that I don't agree with him but that doe't seem to fit into good sf.

As for the stories LaFayette was the best. Incidentally, is he the same LaFayette that writes the Ole Doc Methuselah stories? Kuttner's novel, well, it seems that he went out of his way to make fun of Burroughs and the rest. A good story, but . . . The Hot House Planet was all right but not good enough for HoF. Communications was good but slow. A Condition of Beauty was very good but I read the last page and turned over to the next, expecting to find some more of the story. What happened to the rest of it. The Fires Within was very, very good.

I agree completely with Brother Williams. Your titles are rather extreme.

Now, the cover. How come it is that every gal on there is so lightly clad (?) and yet in the story that it is evidently illustrating she is fully dressed? Mind you I'm not complaining, I love 'em, but couldn't you maybe get a story to fit the picture?

Trimmed edges, hugh! I fooled you. I have some relation that works in a place where they have a cutter and I get 'em cut when I get them.—R. R. No. 1, Rochester, Indiana.

And how did Hank the Kutt make fun of Burroughs? We seem to have missed that completely in PORTAL. As for the covers—well, we sigh again. Is your relation a BEM?

DISAPPOINTING ISH
by Larry M. Harris

Dear Editor: You lovely man. You printed it. My letter, I mean, I fairly hopped for joy. One sentence in it still holds up for the Sept. ish. "Your covers, unhappily, get worse and worse. No depth." Not to mention the pastel coloring. Tell the Bergey to return to the type of stuff he did for Dark World.

Ah . . . and speaking of Dark World (which started the avalanche of near-identical Kuttner novels) the Hank, has finally found a new plot. First place to Portal in the Picture. And a warning to the author: Hank, don't start using this one indiscriminately.

This was a disappointing ish; give second to a poor A.C. Clarke opus. Good idea, poorly handled. And this . . . this after History Lesson and Rescue Party.

A. K. Barnes has also done better, but he cops third. A superior HoF, but an inferior story.

Dear little Rene LaFayette (in re Rodney Palmer's amazing erratum) receives a bedraggled fourth-place ribbon. Worst of the series.

And—in re the illus for Kuttner and LaFayette, can't Finlay stay away from a certain—ah—portion of female anatomy? Lay off, willya?

The rest are consigned to the lower depths. Communications was done better in one of your competitors, about two years ago. The illus are generally good, though I don't agree with your frantic boosting of Astarita. Much rather have Bok, in the grease-pencil style he uses for Bradbury's opera. (He. I got the plural right.)

Where is the first-loved foster-child of fandom, incidentally? Resting on his (well-deserved) laurels?

Ethergrams. Dirk Schaeffer's got a good idea. Hurray for anti-propaganda-propaganda—8701 Shore Road, Brooklyn 9, New York.

So, you'd bite the hand that prints you, Larry? Well, we'll try to please you better. But who is the first-loved foster-child of fandom, incidentally or otherwise? Again, Curious.

LAFAYETTE, WE IS HERE
by Johnny Wassa

Dear Ed: The "Rene LaFayette" series is the best you have ever published! Detractors to the contrary.

Jack Marsh expresses his reaction to fantasy and science-fiction the way I would, if I could.

In the July issue of STARTLING STORIES Margaret St. Clair fails to click for the first time. And a special nod to TRANSIENCE in the same issue.

The Zeiger letter in the September S.S. is top-drawer stuff!

CNEOCH' is Anglo-Saxon? I thought that was the proper way to spell "wick" in Slovak.

Some of the inside margins are almost non-existant, which makes for hard reading (and the pages are bound too close to the printed words), especially TEV.—119 Pen Argyl, Penn.

All right, Johnny—"Blessed be the cneochted, for they shall inherit . . .?"

We hope the reading gets easier forthwith. Slovak and double-Slovak.

HABIT FORMED
by Al Wickham—or Cneochtham

Dear Editor: I guess I've got the habit already. Awhile back I wrote my first letter to an s-f magazine (or is it a s-f magazine?) and, whaddaya know, they published it. Without even my saying that it was my first letter. Marvelous. So here we go again.

1. I hate all your covers This one is no exception.

2 Henry Kuttner. I really feel this man has earned his reputation. (Not so ot Bradbury, for instance.) "The Portal In the Picture" was rather slow-moving and very little in it was new to me—even with my little experience with s-f—but I liked it all the same. Kuttner can write and that makes all the difference.

3 I hate all your hall of fame stories, and wonder what kinds of nincompoops can request to have them reprinted. Or are you just kidding us? This one I haven't read and don't intend to, so it will probably be the one good one. But I doubt it. (And in the back of the magazine, you puff a bookful of hall of feme stories! I repeat, are you kidding?)

4. "Communications" is typical of John D. MacDonald; I can tell because it confused me and because it is such a barefaced rewrite of somebody else's idea. MacDonald has never learned that you can't keep bouncing the reader from one character's mind to another's without losing him (the reader) in the process; that would seem like a very elementary rule to me, but than I'm not a writer (yet). As for the idea, there was a yarn about using Lewis Carroll to confuse a machine published in a rival magazine about 1946 that did the exact same thing. And did it better.

5. The other MacDonald story is so-so. It only had one surprise to offer, and the author gave that one away. Sometimes I think MacDonald must be a pen-name for Bradbury.

6. The Clarke story was very fine. I like this author and hope you'll publish him often. He has a way of putting in small details that make a story seem very real. I spotted the surprise here too but the story was so well told that I didn't care.

7. "Beyond the Black Nebula." This LaFayette seems to think that important events in history are always made by individuals acting against the opposition of everybody else. Maybe he has a notion that he's that kind of person himself. It seems to me that most of the big things in the history books were done by people going with the current not against it. Would Columbus have discovered America if Spain hadn't been kind of weak in the treasury at that time? I kind of doubt it But it wasn't a bad story.

8. The Ley article was prima stuff and it's nice to see somebody who knows what he's talking about. Let me add my voice to the letters objecting to those awful Tremaine articles. You should be ashamed of yourself to have published such crackpot stuff as "fact." It's only one step from that kind of thing to telling your readers that all your stories are really true and that the world is run by little men who live in caves.

9. S-f fan magazines. Freud protect me from that mania. I think you have too many departments. It would be nice to have a story (an additional story) instead. This includes your editorial. I'm sorry to say. You seldom manage to say very much, even though you seem to have good intentions. Why not just run the letter column and the stories? They are the only things of real interest.

10. I include this tenth item only because Cabell says things have to go by tens forever and with me what Cabell says goes. (The world is really run by little Cabells in caves, who prompt people like Tremaine to write articles about "the expected environment" only to conceal THE AWFUL TRUTH. As a matter of fact there's really nothing to heredity at all; science is just a blind; magic is the real truth. But don't tell anybody I told you or I'd be turned into Earle Bergey in a twinkling, just like it says in the fairy tales).—19 West 27th Street New York 1, New York.

That is what we call a real tee-off, Mr. Cneochtham. We'll skip the covers, agree with palms of Henrykuttner, look the other way on the HoF. But James is neither MacDonald nor Leinster as someone suggested above. He is a very young and very promising writer on his own hook (his by-line *is* a pseudonym but his own). With COMMUNICATIONS in the September SS and PARADOX in the October TWS we feel that he has definitely established himself. You'll be seeing more of him, we hope.

Which takes care of MacDonald and we agree again on Clarke. But we tend to battle you on LaFayette. The way of innovators has varied throughout history from the hard to the impossible. Let's take another look at Columbus, for instance, whom you propose as your go-along-with-the-mob event-maker.

Actually, he had the devil's own time getting backing for his jaunt to America and, after a brief period of glory, wound up a broken man in chains. The West Indies, at the time of his famed "voyage of discovery" were actually a Portuguese monopoly and the only reason the still-shaky Spanish (they were still fighting Moors at the time) backed him was in the faint hope of busting said monopoly, which they did. See William Bolitho's "Twelve Against the Gods."

Stay out of Tremaine's cave. He bites. As for the little man, well, it's painfully close to truth, is it not? And lay off the fanzines and our editorial. If our readers

are willing to spend the time and the money to put out amateur magazines devoted to the promulgation of stf, we intend to see that they get some recognition here. As for the editorials, so we have to say something? Since when. We believe in sevens, not tens, and can marshal as many facts for the one as against the other. But not here, bub, not here.

Write us again and start another argument.

MIGHTY GOOD
by Bill Searles

Dear Editor: Though no issue could live up to the all-around readableness of your "Against the Fall of Nite" issue, this one was mighty good. The novel was really super. It darn near beat "The Time Axis," which was the only other Kuttner-yarn that I really liked. And "What Mad Universe" didn't make me laugh like this did.

Speaking of laughing, the cover nearly sent me into hysterics. The Bergey-babe was the living image of "My Friend Irma" (a radio personality to you-who-have-no-radios).

To get back to the novel, the illustrations were the most beautiful that VF has done for your mag, (except the one on page 10). When you printed the complicated, dull and formula-ridden "Flight into Yesterday," I was afraid you were taking over the style of a very-respected—but stinking—competitor. This novel cancelled that idea.

The only other comment on Sept. issue is a query. In your answer to Ginny Shawl's amusing letter, what did you mean by two goatees?—827 Nathan Hale Road, West Palm Beach, Florida.

Since Marie Wilson (Irma) is truly a luscious platter—we hesitate to call her a flying dish—we see nothing wrong with the cover in question. As for the two goatees—that's all our personal beard formation permits us to grow. Sort of an incipient von Tirpitz effect that cannot even be tucked into the collar, much less the belt as the old admiral did.

UNGANLEY
by W. Paul Ganley

Dear Editor: "Go N.T. GO! Go N.T. Go. Hit 'em High, Hit 'em Low, Go Kopczynski Go!" (Stf editors, of course.) Or something similar, as we used to yell each Autumn when our H.S. winning football team trots out during the second half, leading by the scant score of 56-0. Yes sir, they would go as if on wheels—elliptical wheels, naturally. As you seem to be so fond of announcing, Sefah!

No wheel in nature? What about the galaxy itself? Isn't that distributed in the form of a complex, gigantic cart-wheel? Or doesn't that count?

Well, enough of dodging for the present. The ultimate moment has finally arrived. We will proceed to analyze Vol. 20, No. 1 SS.

Good Lord, no! We must have indigestion or something! Not that one . . . Francis Buck takes the top honors. The HoF is justified! I wonder what the Taine tale will be like. . . .

Good ole "Hack" Kuttner returns . . . with one of his best novels. But why pretend Eddie isn't a hero and why all those references to AQ and The Warlord of Mars. Really, it was a scream. But true. Yes, true none-the-less. I think "Tarzan" is the only human character of Burroughs, anyway. Though Carson Napier isn't so bad.

TPITP really wasn't in the Merritt style, which Kuttner is supposed to possess. (Wonder if that's why we usually disliked his other stories . . .?) But we seem to recall that it was a fellow named Hannes Bok who finished FOX WOMAN and THE BLACK WHEEL (Those wheels again!)

After perusing COMMUNICATIONS (great Ghul another Kuttner nom da plume) we were amused to see Capt. Ken Slater's letter begin: The time has come, the walrus said, etc., etc. (Since he didn't use " 's" neither are we). Matter of fact, we started one of our letters that way.

Wal, after that, we rather enjoyed A CONDITION OF BEAUTY . . . inspired no doubt, by a belated visit to ye ed. Could have been longer. Should have been longer. We're beginning to like MacDonald . . . what does he do, grow all of those good stories . . .? "Old Macdonald had a farm . . ."

Well, after that came THE FIRES WITHIN, and then . . . Say, what's happening here? All of the stories were superb. We now like SS as much as—.

"Rene LaFayette" wrote an excellent story, with a minimum of plot . . . rise "Miss" LaFayette, and come forth. We dub thee Knight of the Order of Those-Who-Write-Good-Stories-With-Absolutely-No-Plot, formerly composed only of Ray Bradbury and Leslie Charles Bow-er Whosis.

May we rehash an old story? It appeared in the Jan. '49 SS. You have asked us to give forth with ideas. Well, we have discovered the flaw (to put it contritely, whatever that means) in FLAW, which, Startlingly, was by J. MacDonald.

Remember it? Instead of there being an expanding universe it postulated the opposite, a shrinking solar system. Yet it was supposed to be the opposite of Einstein's hypothesis (I think Einstein's). If we work backwards, considering the Expanding Universe theory as the opposite of FLAW's basis, we find that if you go someplace out of the universe away from the "expanding influence" to return later, you will find yourself knee high to a Rickettsia. But that is sadly erroneous.

The Expanding Universe idea does not mean that matter is constantly growing larger with relation to a stationary object. It means—well, look: Through the "infinite" universe are scattered huge star systems, clustered in the form of a cart-wheel, called galaxies. Several, appearing to a low-power magnification as nebulae, have been discovered. By measuring the wave lengths of the emitted radiation (involving, we believe, the so-called Doppler effect) it has been found that these galaxies are rapidly increasing in distance from our own at a uniform speed.

Picture the galaxies as molecules of gas in a balloon. Now, the expanding universe does not mean, as the balloon blows up when gas is introduced into it; but as the molecules of gas would separate if the balloon were suddenly plunged into a large space of a vacuum, so do the star systems, or galaxies. Perhaps in the unthinkably remote future, they will begin again to come together.—119 Ward Road, North Tonawanda, New York.

Okay, we'll do a little expanding ourselves, W. Paul. Looking back over the years we find that—with the exception of Margaret St. Clair, whose style has always been unmistakably her own—when we introduce a new author, the coyotes gather 'round and begin baying at us.

Sometimes their howls sound like "Kuttner-kuttner kuuuuutttnneerrr," sometimes (and this can be truly eerie) like "Leinster-leinster lllleeeeiiiinnnnssss-ttteeerrrr," sometimes like "Johnmacdonald-johnmacdonald" and so on, far into both night and day.

It has happened with such disparate talents as those of Charles W. Harness, Fredric Brown and now Edwin James. Apparently no loyal stfan seems to want to think that anyone but the already established few he likes or dislikes the most are capable of writing science fiction worthy of consideration. 'Struth, 'tis an eerie situation.

As for MacDonald, he is just beginning to hit his real stf stride—as his JOURNEY FOR SEVEN in TWS and his magnificent forthcoming lead novel for ourselves, WINE OF THE DREAMERS, should go a long way toward proving. Along with Fred Brown, Bradbury, St. Clair and a few notable others, he is one of the leading lights of the new group of stf authors who have been moving in on the field.

Otherwise, a thoroughly interesting letter, friend BEM.

COVERLOVER
by Herbert Kushner

Dear Editor: In 1949, more than in any other year, your magazine has grown to startling maturity. Such notables as A. E. van Vogt and Willy Ley have come into your fold of authors. Yet there is one fault in your magazine about which little has been said and even less done. Your cover remains the same style and type as those found on the cheaper variety of thrillers

This month's (September 1949) cover is a shining example. The scene which Bergey so (hah) earnestly is trying to portray is from "The Hot House Planet." I give you quoted phrases from the story:

"Eternal mists, swirling with sluggish dankness." We get a few wisps of a white cloudy substance. "Tall varieties of trees, which shoot hundreds of feet up into the curtain of the mist their broad-bladed leaves spread wide to treasure every stray sunbeam that filters through." We get a beautiful blue sky and two barely visible palms. "Undergrowth, which is confined to a sprawling cactus-like shrub with poisonous spines and to a great many species of drably flowering plants." We get a beautiful lush green lawn. And, to conclude isn't Miss Carlyle's "costume" a bit scanty for protection against the Whizbang Beetles, poisonous growth and huge animals?

Enough said about that.

Mr Karl Zeiger Ph.D., whose very remarkable letter I have just finished, certainly does not seem to me the type of person capable of speaking for the average reader. If the average letter-writer is not the average reader I'd like to know who is.

I'm surprised at Joseph Burn's comments on time travel. Anyone, who has been reading science fiction for any length of time should know that a person who reported a time traveler or anything not common would be sent to the nearest booby-hatch How about ancient myths and legends about gods and their magical conveyances. Apollo's chariot and Zeus's thunderbolts might not have been mere imaginative wanderings of some half mad fanatic.

This month the two novelets and Ley's article outclassed all competition.

Does anyone have back-dated mags for sale? If so, send me your lists and prices.—1501 West Lexington Street, Baltimore 23 Maryland.

And who, pray thee, is Joseph "Burn"? Elucidate, please.

INCOMPLETE
by Dave Hammond

Dear Editor: I have just completed (nearly) the September SS and I reckon it my duty to pass on one of the best issues you have had in a long time

In commenting on Kuttner's best-in-the-issue, should one say "Kuttner does it again" or "Kuttner does it as usual"? THE PORTAL IN THE PICTURE was one of the best novels I have ever read in ye olde STARTLING. It wouldn't be fair to call it THE best because there have been so many good ones.

It was especially entertaining to me the way in which Hank deviously injected a comparison between Eddie Burton and John Carter, Tarzan and Allen Quatermain. Every HK story is handled in a different fashion, showing new facets of his literary achievements. I doubt if anyone could class Hank's style of writing. Another enjoyable method of Hank is the way he describes the atmosphere, the feeling, the unreality of Melesca. If you haven't already guessed, I like Kuttner.

I'm interested in getting together with some other science-fiction fans I would like to put out a fan mag. I know where I can use a mimeograph machine, I can get necessary paper, I can write and draw, but I do not think I am able to fill a magazine.

I propose this to be a teen-age group, so how about somebody writing me a little letter so we can get started on the best dam fan-mag ever published! I have had a little experience in journalism: in eighth grade I was art editor on a little dittoed mag and now, in my junior year, I am literary editor on the high school newspaper, the PARROT.

I have had a little experience publishing a fan-mag named the Galley Times, the official organ of the Royal and Ancient Order of the Galley Slaves (not a religious organization). For a little eight-paged dittoed rag it was quite a headache to print and sell. In the first place the "powers that ba" in the school were definitely not in favor of the revolutionary policy of the Galley Times so that sale was entirely "below the counter." It was lots of fun though.

I have a few books that I'd like to exchange for the novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs. I have all the Tarzan books except THE TARZAN TWINS, I have all the Venus and Mars adventures and I have THE BANDIT OF HELL'S BEND, THE ETERNAL LOVER and PELLUCIDAR. I need all the rest.

In exchange I can give Bram Stoker's very "Dracula," H. G. Wells' classic "War of the Worlds" and Sir Henry Rider Haggard's exotic "She." If none of these appeal to anybody, I'll pay coin of the realm for the Burrough's books I need to round out my collection.

I am new to fandom so I would like to get involved in a "generally pointless discussion on obscure subjects" that Karl V. Zeiger thinks so little of. Let me see . . . What can I say to produce an interesting discussion? I have it! Kuttner writes like a two-year-old Bradbury gets the ideas for his stories from dero rays. Ethergrams should be taken from STARTLING. All letter writers have to have at least a Ph.D. after their names. Poetry should be verboten and anyone attempting humorous writing should be sent to Siberia. There should be a Philadelphia world series.

That's enough from me. WHY DOESN'T J. M. THOMAS OF N. FRANKLIN AVENUE IN PHILLY ANSWER HER MAIL?—806 Oak Street Runnemede, New Jersey.

And why don't you go out and get your Ph. D.? Luck with the fanproject, Dave. It should be fun.

Which concludes us for the time being. We'll drop around next month in TWS with more of same and be back at this stand come the March issue. See you both times, we hope.

—THE EDITOR.

LOOK FORWARD TO NEXT ISSUE'S HEADLINERS!

THE LADY IS A WITCH

A Fantastic Novel by NORMAN A. DANIELS

and

MEN MUST DIE

A Hall of Fame Novelet by WARD HAWKINS

PLUS MANY OTHER STORIES AND FEATURES!

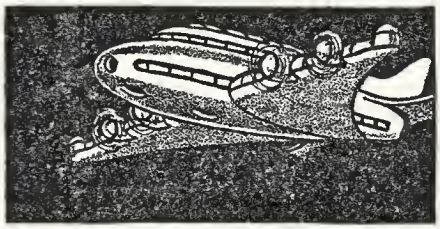
REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

THERE'S always something new in fandom. This time Emil Petaja, an addict of no small repute, writes in to announce that he and another ex-GI, Fran Hanson, have opened a photographic studio at 579 Bridgeway Boulevard, Sausalito, California, with the idea of producing and selling fantasy photos, individually, in sets and/or made to order.

"For instance," Mr. Petaja writes, "if you want a picture of you making love to a Venusian Whozat or riding a Martian Loblolly. . . ."

Well, for ourselves, we dunno, but for those of you who relish such photographic hi-jinks, it sounds like a fair idea.

Don Berry, of the Portland, Oregon, Berrys and THE FANSCIENT, sends us



words of rebuke. It seems that Don, himself an actifan, is continually receiving credit for the excellent fanartwork of professional commercial artist and illustrator, D. Bruce Berry of the California Berrys. Don, D. Bruce and both Berrys—it seems to us that the error is understandable.

However, we are glad to rectify same and promise never, never to do it again!

The Cricket Chirps

Betsy (Mrs. Elizabeth M.) Curtis and husband Ed have come in with a neat little brochure called THE CRICKET from their "editorial offices, mimeograph salon, studio, dishwashing and ironing parlors, nursery and residence, 201 Veterans Village, Canton, New York."

While not limited to stf chatter and blurbs, it is conceived along general fanzine

[*Turn page*]

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lines, even to a letter-column-to-be entitled THE IVORY BASEMENT. It ranges from discussion of comic books to the poems of E. E. Cummings in subject matter with considerable sprightly comment amidships anent stf prozines. We wish it a long and happy life.

Having thus dealt with the "specials" for the issue, we'll get down to plastic tacks at once and announce another large A-list and small B-list caboose—for which, to all and sundry engaged in the fanzine field, congratulations, with a few minor exceptions. *Allons.*

Our A-List

ALIEN CULTURE, 4718 Forest Hills Road, Rockford, Illinois. Editor, Jim Leary. Published irregularly. 15c per copy, 4 copies 50c.

An ambitious and on the whole successful third issue of AC. Dr. Keller has one of his effective if heavy-handed little satires which comes off a bit better than Art Rapp's somewhat labored attempt to find humor in Wordsworth's apparent foreseeing of Bikini in his "Elegiac Stanzas." Ed Cox debunks the socalled "good old days" of prozines thoroughly and Ray Isadore comes up with a brief but interesting profile of fantacist Seabury Quinn among other sound features. Artwork, printing, etc., generally superior but cover awfully familiar.

THE BLACK SKULL MAGAZINE, 917 Park Avenue, St. Louis 4, Missouri. Editors, Arthur Tate & H. S. Weatherby, HM1. Published quarterly. No price listed.

We wish the information on this inter-Service 'zine were more complete as, despite its recent dissection by us in the TWS FRYING PAN, it is an impressive over-all job. It contains lengthy fiction to the number of eight stories, including THE ABOMINABLE by Herman S. King, BLACK HORROR FROM THE VOID by Tate & R. F. Dikeman and an appeal to feminine readers in THE RADIO GIRL, again by Tate, among others. It runs definitely to the grue.

DAWN, 2050 Midland, Louisville 4, Kentucky. Editors, Lester Fried, Russell Watkins & Bill Wentworth. Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy, 3 copies 25c.

The lively VOM pattern continues in this hinterland letter-zine, which also contains this time out a somewhat Amazonish hunk of alleged fiction by Basil Wells entitled QUEENS OF SPACE. Current controversies are concerned with NFFF vota counts and such tired-and-trues as race prejudice, the iniquities of stf dealers and the like. Fills a needed spot in fandom.

FANTASY REVIEW, 115 Wanstead Park Road, Ilford, Essex, England. Editor, Walter Gillings. Published quarterly. 25c per copy, $1.00 per annum.

The top English (or American) fanzine has been forced onto a quarterly basis by production difficulties (moan!) but with no depreciation of editorial standards or contributor acrimony. Lead article in the current issue describes a recent London convention in which us pro-eds took a general pasting and Bill Temple and Editor Gillings got into a gorgeous spat. This lively edition also included the usual high-level gossip and review pages, a profile of Bradbury, the FANTASY FORUM, and articles by Kenneth Slater, Thomas Sheridan, Geoffry Giles and Richard B. Gehman, the last-named condensed from THE NEW REPUBLIC. A fine example for all adult fandom.

FANTASY-TIMES, 137-03 32nd Avenue, Flushing, New York. Editor, James V. Taurasi. Published twice monthly. 10c per copy.

This king among fantasy newzines continues to increase its scope and is the only current and regularly published thing of its kind which not only attempts to keep track of international developments but does so in comprehensive form.

Needless to say, its U.S. stf news is equally complete. Very much aliva.

HAZING STORIES, no address in evidence. Editor, Bab K. Pavlat. Published irregularly. No price listed.

Modarately amusing newcomer in which members of the Washington (D.C.) SFA kick up their heels. Their satire on current Congressional misbehavior, entitled THE ULTIMATE INVESTIGATION, is sound sophomore stuff but apparently the editors want no comeback else they would have printad their address.

OPERATION FANTAST, H.Q., 13 Gp. R.P.C., B.A.O.R., 23, c/o G.P.O., England. Editor, Captain K. F. Slater. Published quarterly. 15c per copy, 6 copies 75c.

How Captain Slatar not only gets out this 'zina but manages to improve it steadily whila on duty in the British Army of Occupation in Germany almost puts it into the mystery rather than stf category. Somehow, however, he has done it. Tha current issue features a lively new SCIENCE REVIEW by Captain Slater and an effective and articulate tala of postatomic desolation, HERITAGE, by Cedric Walker, as well as other thoughtful material. A good buy.

PEON, 2116 Edsall Court, Alameda, California. Editor, Charles Lee Riddle, PN1, USN. Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy, 6 copies 50c.

The U.S. Navy continues its literary outpourings, doubtless prompted by the ghosts of Lieutenant Commander John C. Symmes (Adam Seaborn) and Admiral Mahan of later vintage. Fair poetry, fair fiction, fair art and blooming controvarsy anent one Vaughn Greene's far from flattering anelysis of our alleged democracy, which appeared in a previous issua.

QUANTA? P.O. Box No. 7595, Benjamin Franklin Station, Washington 4, D. C. Editor, Franklin Kerkhof. Published irregularly. Free to members of the WSFA.

A naat and thoughtful job, led by comment on and a synopsis of a speech by Captain James Saunders on general semantics delivered before the WSFA, in which the captain sought a coordination of human knowledge through fuller understanding of word symbols. Numerous other features headed by Chick Derry's A DEFENSE AND CRITICISM OF S-F, which needs little defense at present but cen take plenty of criticism and learn therefrom. A well-executed job.

THE ROCKET NEWS LETTER AND THE JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT, 10630 S. Saint Louis Avenue, Chicago, Illinois. Editor, Wayne Proell. Published monthly. 15c per copy, $1.50 per annum.

This standby for rocket lovers has stepped up its field of interest with the SPACE FLIGHT addition to its masthead. Thus it moves forward in logical progression. A must for thosa interested in the technical problems of rockets and of the probable imminence of flight off this Earth. The additions add greatly to its stf interests.

[*Turn page*]

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THE SCIENCE-FICTION BOOKMAN, 1746 Columbia Road NW, Washington 9, D. C. Editor, Roy W. Loan. Published bi-monthly. Free to those who write in for it.

A valuable and comprehensive catalogue and price list of the stf and fantasy book markets in which, according to Editor Loan, "The attempt will be made whenever possible to give a short quotation from book reviews, dust wrappers etc. In the case of new books these comments will be listed in two consecutive issues; thereafter only the bibliographic data will be carried as long as the book is available." Should fill a long-felt need.

SHANGRI LA, 1305 Ingraham Street, Los Angeles 13, California. Editor, Forrest J. Ackerman. Published every six weeks. 15c per copy.

Full and lively as ever, with a contents list that includes such by-lines as E. Everett Evans, Eph Konigsberg, A. E. van Vogt, Bryce Walton and L. Major Reynolds. Need we say more? No.

SLANT, 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, Northern Ireland. Editor, Walter A. Willis. Published irregularly. Price, one prozine per issue.

An artistic and interesting little job, first to emerge from Northern Ireland. Mostly fiction with Cedric Walker's ALL DOGS ARE EQUAL and editor Willis' OUTCAST leading the parade. Art Editor James White's pseudo woodcuts are spotty but intriguing. A welcome neophyte.

SPACEWARP, 2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan. Editor, Arthur H. Rapp. Published monthly. 15c per copy.

This fanstandby continues its lively if occasionally sloppy progress, ranging between the sub-freshman and the adult. The STF BROADCASTS AGAIN! serial by Anonymous goes into its eighth part, threatening long-run seniority of Sam Moskowitz fanhistory in a rival fanzine. Kennedy's NO GREATER DREAM draws a long laudation from Redd Boggs. Fun most of the way.

And this winds up a healthy A-list, which provided us with much entertainment, some food for thought and only a few winces. As for the B's—well, let's see—

Our B-List

THE BURROUGHS BULLETIN, 1100 Western Avenue, Peoria, Illinois. Editor, V. Coriell. Published irregularly. No price listed. Latest brochure in this Tarzan phenomenon of the phanzine phield includes INTERVIEW WITH AN APE MAN by Professor Arthur Maxon, a new high or whatever in this bizarre branch of fanzinedom. More on this in next month's TWS FRYING PAN.

THE FANTOPOLOGIST, Bethalto, Illinois. Editor, H. T. McAdams. Published irregularly.

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No price listed. This might turn into a good deal if Editor McAdam would smarten up his format and increase his contributors. As it is, it's more or less a sloppy one-man-band.

ONE FAN'S OPINION, Box No. 1199 Grand Central Station, New York 17, New York. Editor, Lee D. Quinn. Published irregularly. A far-from sloppy one-man-band of which we have real hopes. Mr. Quinn chatters entertainingly on fanews, ranging from the trivial to the provocative.

SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT, 219 Huntleigh Avenue, Fayetteville, New York. Editor, Alan M. Grant. Published irregularly. 10c per copy. We received two copies of this brand newcomer and wish we could give you an opinion on it—but both, alas, were illegible.

SPATIUM, Box No. 61, Clinton, New York. Editors, Ronald Stone & Harold W. Cheney. Published bi-monthly. 10c per copy. Despite a JoKennedy opus on moontravel, this nosedives to the B-list for a dull June-July issue. We hope it does a zoom in the near future and lands back on the A-list where it should be. Sorry.

STARK TERROR TALES, 1047 Louisa Street, Elizabeth, New Jersey. Editor, S. J. Gluck. Published irregularly. 5c per copy. Almost as hard to read as SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT. We hope editor Gluck's promised FANTHOLOGY comes out better.

STF TRADER, 1028 Third Avenue South, Moorhead, Minnesota. Editor, K. Martin Carlson. Still good for swap and sale stuff but drops from the A-list in view of competition from the superior SF BOOKMAN.

Which ends the dirty job for the nonce. Not a bad two-month period just covered. We hope the sixty-odd days ahead prove as productive and interesting. So long for now.

—THE EDITOR.

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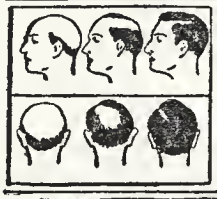

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THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES—1949, edited by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty, Frederick Fell, Inc., New York ($2.95).

A good idea, a good anthology. The Bleiler-Dikty-Fell combination is planning to make this an annual event. If their first volume is a sample of what is to come we stand solidly in their corner. The stories are excellent and representative of the better stf of the past couple of years (most of them are 1948 copyright.)

Among them we spot three old favorites from our companion magazine, THRILLING WONDER STORIES—the three being KNOCK by Fredric Brown, AND THE

MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT by Ray Bradbury and HAPPY ENDING by Henry Kuttner. They are beyond question among our personal favorites.

The remaining nine stories in the volume are MARS IS HEAVEN! by Bradbury, EX MACHINE by Lewis Padgett, THE STRANGE CASE OF JOHN KINGMAN by Murray Leinster, DOUGHNUT JOCKEY by Erik Fennell, THANG by Martin Gardner, PERIOD PIECE by J. J. Coupling, GENIUS by Poul Anderson, NO CONNECTION by Isaac Azimov and IN HIDING by Wilmar H. Shiras. Of these we found Mr. Coupling's story the most arresting but you'll have to pick your own.

There are also an introduction by Melvin Korshak, reviewing the history, present and possible future of stf, and a preface detailing the reasons for selection by the editors. All in all, an extremely worthwhile volume.

THE BIG EYE by Max Ehrlich, Doubleday & Co., Inc., New York ($2.50).

This is one of the very first stf novels to see print in the much-heralded "big" pub-

lisher drive into the field. By and large it is an excellent example of a first venture into wider popularization of the explained fantastic which is stf.

Mr. Ehrlich's book—a doomsday job with the world solving all its problems on the apparent eve of its extinction—is far better-written than most of the volumes which have been published to date by the small publishers devoted exclusively to the fantasy field. It is adult, exciting, well characterized.

If the basic plot itself is neither new nor deeply scientific, it must be remembered that the publishers are aiming for a far wider market than that which has until lately made up science fiction's readers. And it may well be the most ably conceived and developed version of end-of-the-world stories yet to appear.

Definitely it is a job worth reading—not only because it reveals to what literary levels science fiction may be developed but because it shows the "big" publishers are finally if hesitantly setting foot upon the right track.

THE WORLD BELOW by S. Fowler Wright, Shasta Publishers, Chicago, Illinois ($3.50).

We do not like to use this space for derogatory comment about science fiction publishing but this alleged classic is one which stubbornly resisted all of our efforts to read it through. According to introductory apologist Everett F. Bleiler, "THE WORLD BELOW, like Mr. Wright's other fantastic books, is more than a thriller.

"It is a serious examination of that problem of fatigue and degeneration in man which has resulted from his one-sided growth and lack of harmony with the universe . . . The strongest influence on THE WORLD BELOW is from the Italian poet Dante. The hero's descent, the Amphibian psychopomp, the various hells, the legalistic vulturemen, the satires on the brilliant but wicked lizards and the Killers, all recall the Inferno. It is thus no surprise that Mr. Wright is a Dante scholar and is soon to publish a translation of THE DIVINE COMEDY."

It is too much for us. We found it a singularly uninspired travelogue through a distant future in which modern man could have neither place nor interest. Sorry.

—THE EDITOR

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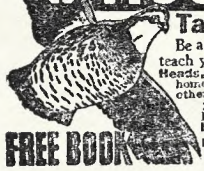

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THE FIRST ONE

(Concluded from page 141)

just sit there—and I guess I'll do some praying. Thanks for coming to watch it!"

They yelled and they blew the borns of the cars. The sound roared in Bus Bannister's ears as he climbed the ladder to the scaffold, slid into the open port and screwed it shut. The sound ceased abruptly. It was very quiet inside the ship.

The suit was there—and the time to climb into it. He looked around and relocated the escape hatch. He slid into the G suit and zipped it up the middle. He clamped the wring flap shut around the base of the helmet and appeared for a moment at the port as he had been instructed.

He could see the thousands of cars down there, see the faces closer by, see the tears that surprisingly gleamed in the sun on the gray withered cheecks of the Vice President. They turned and started to hurry back away from the ship, away from the white fury of the expected blast.

He moved quickly to the escape hatch, put his hand on the concealed handle. He glanced at the automatic timer. Ten seconds to zero. Just barely time to make it. He paused for another second. His hand dropped away from the handle. With frantic haste he climbed into the pilot seat, snapped the heavy plastic webbing across his thighs, around his middle. His eyes were on the clock as he fastened the intake vent to his G suit to the compressed air nozzle. He pushed the cock and the air hissed into the suit. Two seconds to zero. He checked the recoil, unlatched the seat, forced his head back against the deep cushioned rest.

A gigantic hand clamped tightly around his middle and he screamed with all the power of his lungs. Through misted, slitted eyes, he looked up through the quartz port and saw the sky dropping toward him.

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